


The background of the entire image is a close-up, high-angle shot of footprints in sand. The footprints are dark and well-defined, showing the texture of the sand and the shape of the shoes. They are arranged in a diagonal line from the top right towards the bottom left, creating a sense of movement and direction. The lighting is warm, suggesting a sunset or sunrise, with long shadows and a golden hue. The overall composition is simple yet evocative, emphasizing the theme of 'inspiration' through the metaphor of a path or journey.

LIVES THAT INSPIRE

VOLUME II



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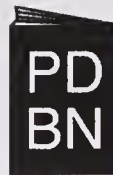


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Cover Design : Rajesh Kumar

Tranlated by : Pragya Paliwal Gaur, Himank Kothiyal, Anasua Banerjee

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PREFACE

NATION-building is a long drawn-out process. A nation can be compared with the human mind. The mind is impacted upon by various kinds of influences, which are sometimes similar, at times complement each other and mutually contradictory at some other point of time. Nation-building is not done by a few prominent personalities, but it is the nation which shapes these personalities. Indeed, once moulded, the personality itself exercises its own impact on the nation. The biggest force that creates history is the people. Great men are those who guide the people on to the path of progress. Though the loftiest thoughts lie dormant in books, the colossal personality of these figures transforms these ideas into a vehicle of change.

This collection comprises life-sketches of such great personalities of India, whose thoughts not only influenced the society during their times but are a source of inspiration for the country even today. All these great names are indelibly associated with the honour and identity of our country.

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RAMANUJACHARYA

—R.N. Tiwari

RAMANUJACHARYA was born in 11th century A.D, 300 years after Shankaracharya. Shri Shankaracharya tread the path of Gnana (knowledge), Ramanujacharya that of Bhakti (Devotion). Like Shankaracharya, Ramanuja too was considered a great scholar of his time, and from the point of view of other scholars, these two great men occupy a place of eminence.

Perabughuram (known as Bhutpur in ancient times), situated some distance away from the city of Madras (now Chennai) in South India, is said to be the birthplace of Ramanuja. His father's name was Aasuri Keshav Dikshit. Ramanuja's mother—Kantimati, was the sister of an old seer by the name of Shri Shailpoorna. She was also related to Shri Yamunacharya and was his granddaughter. The sacred thread ceremony of Ramanuja was performed when he was eight years old and his father began teaching him at the same time. Ramanuja began to show signs of his sharp intellect during the childhood itself. Once he had read a lesson, he could memorise it instantly. Ramanuja was married to a Brahmin girl—Rakshamba. Within a few days of the marriage, Ramanuja's father passed away.

After the demise of his father, Ramanuja and the entire family left Perabhughuram village and moved to Kanchi to settle down there. In those days, Kanchi was a premier centre of education. The status enjoyed by Kanchi in South India was equal to that of Kashi in North India. At that time, Yadavprakashya was considered to be the head of all scholars. He was a follower of Shankaracharya. It was his view that all the living or non-living forms in the world other than the formless Brahma, the Supreme Soul without attributes, are a myth. Ramanuja began to study Vedas and Upanishads from the same Yadavprakashya. But after some time, differences began to crop up between the two. In the first instance, the master

excused Ramanuja for his impertinence. But when Ramanuja dubbed Yadavprakash's interpretation as wrong the second time, the master ordered Ramanuja to return to his home. Since then, Ramanuja stopped studying under this teacher. He started reading and studying on his own, at his house.

The story behind Ramanuja's meeting with Kanchipoorna Swami is very interesting. Kanchipoorna Swami's father was a "shudra" and his mother—'Shabri' (untouchable). However, Kanchipoorna Swami was counted amongst the leading saint of the Vaishnava community. Kanchipoorna Swami was one of the five prominent disciples of Yamunacharya, the famous Head priest of Vaishnava community. It is said that while Ramanuja was living at Perabughuram, Kanchipoorna Swami happened to pass that way. Ramanuja took Kanchipoorna Swami to his home respectfully. After dinner, Kanchipoorna Swami stretched himself out in the veranda. When Ramanuja wanted to massage his feet, Kanchipoorna stopped him from doing so. He said, "I belong to a low caste, while you are a Brahmin. A Brahmin should not massage the feet of a shudra". Ramanuja became very sad on hearing this and said, "My destiny is bleak, because of which I cannot get the right to serve great monk like you. One does not become a Brahmin merely by wearing the sacred thread. The worshippers of Hari (Lord) are the true Brahmins."

Kanchipoorna Swami was greatly impressed by this. Since then, the two established a relation of love and devotion between them.

The fame of Ramanuja's erudition was growing by the day. Yamunacharya wanted Ramanuja to succeed him as the head priest (mahant) of Vaishnavas. However, the heir to the seat of head priest of Vaishnavas had to be a Saint of Vaishnava community. Hence, Yamunacharya despatched Mahapoorna Swami from Srirangam to call Ramanuja from Kanchi. It was at Kanchi that Mahapoorna Swami initiated Ramanuja to Vaishnava community.

After a few days, Ramanuja left for Srirangam to seek a glimpse (darshan) of Yamunacharya. However, when he reached Srirangam, Ramanuja came to know that Yamunacharya had left for his heavenly abode. However, before his demise, Yamunacharya

had left behind a message for Ramanuja. In the message, Ramanuja had been asked to ensure that he must perform three tasks: (i) to write a commentary on the sources of Vedantas (ii) to compile a compendium (comprehensively connected narrative) of devotional songs of Alvars in Dravidian language and to popularize it as a 'Veda' and elevate it to the status of the 'Fifth Veda' and (iii) to name a great scholar of Vaishnavas in the memory of the great sage, Parashar, the composer of Vishnu Purana. Ramanuja did not stay back in Srirangam, but returned to Kanchi immediately.

At the time when Mahapoorna Swami had come to Kanchi to invite Ramanuja, he had brought his wife along. He stayed at Ramanuja's house with her for six months. Taking advantage of the opportunity, with his help, Ramanuja made a study of the 4,000 melodious devotional songs in Dravidian language in the form of a compendium.

One day, Mahapoornaji's wife and Ramanuja's wife left the house together to fetch water. On the way, they had an altercation over some issue. When Mahapoornaji came to know of the quarrel, he left for Srirangam with his wife. Ramanuja had gone away to the market at that time. On his return, when Ramanuja came to know of the quarrel, he became extremely sad. He sent back his wife to her father's house the very same day and himself became a monk.

After Yamunacharya, there was no leader left among the Vaishnavas. As a result, dissatisfaction was fast spreading among the community. Everyone felt that Ramanuja should adorn the seat. A messenger was sent from Srirangam to Kanchi to call him. As Ramanuja had already become a monk, this time he accepted the invitation and on reaching Srirangam, occupied the seat vacated by Yamunacharya. The head priest (mahant) on the seat of Srirangam, had to look after the temple of Rangnathji as well. Ramanuja was very glad to look after this task. Whatever earnings came from the temple, were spent on the worship and service of the Lord. Ramanuja never took even a single paisa for himself. For his food, he invariably accepted alms daily.

While living at Srirangam, he got the exact and accurate

interpretations of the 'mantras (incantation/vedic hymns)' given by Yamunacharya, through Yamunacharya's disciples. In this context, it is imperative to mention an important incident. It has been already mentioned that Yamunacharya had five prominent disciples. One of them was Goshthipoorna Swami. On the suggestion of Mahapoornaji, Ramanuja proceeded to learn from Goshthipoornaji, the secret 'mantra' taught by Yamunacharyaji. This 'mantra' was known only to Goshthipoornaji. Goshthipoorna evaded Ramanuja's entreaties 18 times, but granted him the initiation to the secret 'mantra' when Ramanuja requested him the 19th time, but subject to the condition that Ramanuja would not reveal the secret 'mantra' to an undeserving person, or to a stranger.

Having received the initiation to the secret 'mantra', Ramanuja left for the temple of Ranganathji. On the way, a fair at the temple of Narasimha Swamy was being held. The fair was teeming with crowd of Vaishnavas. Seeing the crowd, Ramanuja could not restrain himself and positioned himself on a raised pedestal and started chanting the same secret 'mantra' loudly, which Goshthipoornaji had initiated him to, that very day. When Goshthipoornaji heard of Ramanuja's misdeed, he flew into a fit of rage and summoned Ramanuja through his disciples. When Ramanuja came, the conversation that followed between him and Goshthipoornaji, is worth remembering forever.

Goshthipoornaji: "Are you not aware of the consequences of not heeding to your teacher's instructions?"

Ramanuja: "I am aware of it, Sir!! One has to live in hell for ten thousand years."

Goshthipoornaji: "Then why did you repeat the secret 'mantra' in front of everyone without my permission?"

Ramanuja: "Lord, it is a grave mistake on my part, but you only had told me that all those listening to the 'mantra' would go to heaven. On seeing so many people, I began chanting the 'mantra' so that all the people could attain heaven, even if I drop down into hell. So, doing this appeared justified to me, that is why I did so. You may gladly inflict any punishment upon me for not obeying

your orders. I am ready to serve the punishment."

Goshthipoornaji's anger subsided on hearing this. He embraced Ramanujua and said—"You are my teacher and I am your disciple."

It has already been narrated that before his demise, Yamunacharya had told his disciples to tell Ramanuja to obey three instructions that he had given. When Ramanuja learnt about them, he undertook an oath there and then, "I will carry out these three instructions". Tales of the beauty with which he fulfilled his oath are still popular in the entire world. It was due to this oath that Ramanuja declared the compendium of devotional songs of Alvars in Dravidian language to be the 'Fifth Veda', and named the son of one of his disciples—Kuresh, as Parashar Bhatt and also wrote a commentary on Vedant-Sutras.

Contradicting monism (Advaitvaad) in his commentary, *Shribhashya*, Ramanuja proved by providing the correct meaning of the 'mantras' in Upanishads, that the worship of the formless Supreme Soul, Brahma, has not been mentioned anywhere in Vedant Sutras. On the contrary, Brahma's form has been proved in these Sutras. Ramanuja also proved that the means to attain liberation is not through knowledge, but through devotion. Again, in the same, *Shribhashya*, Ramanuja has dubbed Shankaracharya as a latent Buddhist, because, Shankaracharya has used the arguments of Buddhists in his debates on scriptures.

After completing *Shribhashya*, Ramanuja set out for a journey of the country. He held debates on scriptures with several masters in major cities. Wherever he went and had debates on scriptures with the experts, he emerged victorious. The desire of a universal victory took him to Kashmir and he also visited Kanchi. He held debates on scriptures with the scholars in Kashmir and Kanchi, and at both the places, he emerged victorious. Thousands of men and women received initiation from him and several kings and emperors became his disciples. Ramanuja returned to Srirangam en route Perabhuguram.

The Chola King at Kanchi was a Shaivite. He was infuriated with the growing publicity of Vaishnava religion. He got a banner

hung at the Rangji temple located in Srirangam. The banner read—'Shivatparo Naasti (no one is greater than Lord Shiva)'. Anyone who opposed the Shaiviite view would have had to risk his life. The king started perpetrating atrocities on Vaishnavas. He even called over Ramanuja to Kanchi, with the motive to get him killed by deceit. However, Ramanuja did not go to Kanchi for twelve years that is till the time the tyrannous king was alive, and till then kept constantly publicizing Vaishnava religion at a place called Shalagram in the State of Mysore. In the meantime, he got a temple constructed at a place called Yadavadri (Melukot). The idol installed in the temple was the one which had been dug out by Ramanuja, after he saw the idol in his dream.

Out of the books written by Ramanuja, *Shreebhashya* has already been discussed before. Besides this, he also composed a *Geeta-Bhashya* on *Shrimadbhagvatgita*. In one of his books, *Vedarth-Sangrah*, he contradicted illusionism, he gave a concise explanation of his famous work, *Shribhashya* in a book titled *Vedanta-Deep* and also gave a simple description of his principles in a work titled 'Vedanta-Saar'.

Shankaracharya had propounded monism (Advaitvaad). His view was that the formless Supreme Soul, devoid of all attributes, is the only truth and everything else that we see, living or non-living, are an illusion and a myth. He used to say that "Shruti" (Vedas and Upanishads) also speak of Brahma as being the truth, uniform and eternal. There is no difference between a 'living being' and 'Brahma'. If any difference is indeed palpable, it is due to ignorance. Hence, the medium for liberation is good knowledge and the destruction of ignorance. In Shankaracharya's opinion, the love for God and his service have no place.

Shankaracharya's view was exactly opposite to the view held by the Vaishnavas. Hence, it was the strong desire of Vaishnavas that the evidence of Upanishads through which Shankaracharya established the Advaita view, that evidence should be used to contradict illusionism and establish the veracity of Vaishnavism. Through *Shribhashya*, Ramanuja contradicted Shankaracharya's view and supported the Vaishnava school of thought.

Ramanuja used to say that God is not without attributes, but is endowed with attributes, though he does not possess any faults. He is the best among the superior ones and he does not have any miseries in him, due to which he is known as, or appears to be faultless, pure, the most superior one, serene and uniform, only he is the true knowledge.

Shankar's Brahma was attributeless, Ramanuja's Brahma is endowed with attributes. According to one, Brahma is formless, while according to the other, he possesses a form. Whereas Shankaracharya proved that knowledge is the medium for liberation, Ramanujacharya proved that devotion is the only means to attain liberation. That is why Shankar is known as 'Gyanmargi' (one who treads the path of knowledge) and Ramanuja is said to be a 'Bhaktimargi' (one who treads the path of devotion).

KALHANA

—Gargi Gupta

TOWARDS the end of the 11th century (1089-1101 A.D), a King by the name of Harsha ruled in Kashmir. Within a few days of his ascending the throne, Harsha started perpetrating atrocities on his subjects. Fed up of the atrocities, the people of Kashmir revolted. This revolt continued for seven years. In the end, King Harsha was killed in a conspiracy plotted against him.

In Harsha's court, there was a Brahmin minister called Champak, who was very loyal to the King. The name of Champak's son was Kalhana. At the time of the King's demise, Kalhana was a lad. Hence, it is estimated that he would have been born around 1100 A.D. With the assassination of the King, Champak's life too changed. He alienated himself from royal work.

Like Kalhana's father, his paternal uncle, Kanak, too had good access to the King's court. Kanak was a good musician. He enjoyed the benevolence of the King. He usually used to get rewards from the State. Kalhana, who had been brought up amidst the grandeur of the court, is considered to be a great historian of ancient times. If the ancient history of Kashmir is to be understood, *Rajtarangini* would be its real history in the true sense of the term.

A tradition with ancient Indian poets and bards was that they did not deem it proper to write about themselves. Even the historical events that they presented, would be coloured by various hues of their imagination, which would bring the curtains down on the real history. Both these elements are found in a small measure with Kalhana. His work tells us a lot about the history of his time, as well as a lot about Kalhana himself. By penning the history of Kashmir in the form of poetry, Kalhana has done a great service.

The word 'Tarang' in Sanskrit means wave. In *Rajtarangini*, Kalhana has described the rise and fall of royal families of Kashmir in eight 'Tarangs'. He considered money as debasing and a triviality. For him, being a poet was far more respectful. He used to say that the people who enjoy luxurious rides on elephants, the people who have money and prosperity, the people in whose huge palaces live thousands of beautiful women, are forgotten by the world, when they die. But a poet is immortal. He is the one who paves the way for the world.

It is due to these qualities that Kalhana himself and his work—*Rajtarangini*, the history of Kashmir, are popular even today.

Kalhana's father was a devotee of Lord Shiva and used to visit Bateshwar annually. As a kid, Kalhana too used to accompany him. The religious views of his father had left an imprint on him too. Even then, Kalhana respected Buddhism a great deal. He had no faith in sacrifices and offerings made by worshippers of Shakti cult. He was an apostle of non-violence.

Kalhana worked very hard to produce his work, *Rajtarangini*, within an year. But before writing the book, Kalhana had to read extensively. He had read several epics in Sanskrit like *Raghuvansh* by Kalidasa, *Harshacharita* by Banabhatt, Vilhana's *Vikramankdevacharita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Brihat Samhita* by Varahamihira. Besides these, like modern-day historians, he also studied ancient manuscripts to collect historical material and utilised it for his history.

Having been born in a Brahmin family, Kalhana was too well-acquainted with the ills and shortcomings of the Brahmins of that age. He knew that Brahmins were not doing hard work as earlier—neither in studying, nor in teaching. They had turned arrogant and needlessly interfered in the royal activities. Hence, Kalhana did not view them with much respect.

Jawaharlal Nehru has correctly written about *Rajtarangini* that this book is history—as well as poetry too. This work had been penned 800 years ago. It contains the history of about a thousand years and more than the first part, its second part is well-written. It describes the palace intrigues, assassinations, fraud, wars,

atrocities, etc. at length. As its name suggests, it is a tale of kings, not of the common people. It contains a beautiful description of the political, social and economic conditions of those times. The book tells that in those times, women were members of 'sabhas' and used to fight like brave soldiers in the battlefield.

Kalhana knew several inside stories about the royal court. After the demise of Harsha, his father had snapped his relations with the royal court. His uncle, Kanak, too had settled down in Kashi. Kalhana could have secured a Government job easily. Had he so wanted, he could have even got a ministerial post with ease. However, he was never interested in a courtier's job. He was a lover of literature and spent all his time in reading and writing.

Kalhana has written the history of Kashmir in such an interesting manner that one enjoys it like a novel. He has described the incidents occurring during the reign of every king of Kashmir in the most lively manner. Here and there, he uses pinpricks and printed barbs like—'anyone who has seen his son suffering from pangs of hunger; his wife working in someone else's household; a friend in distress; a hungry cow that has not had fodder; one whose parents are on the death-bed for the want of medicines and one who has seen his master being defeated at the hands of the enemy, what more worse can such a person see even in hell.'

Kalhana was born in a rich family. He had never seen bad days in his life. He was a stranger to deprivation, may be that is why he never had any greed for money. May be it was because of this, that his book does not mention even a passing reference to the difficulties faced by the poor subjects of the kingdom. He always wrote only about kings and emperors. This was the outlook of history of that time. History was written, with the King as the focus of attention. It is also mentioned in *Mahabharata*—"Raja Kaalasya Kaaranam", which means that it is the King who shapes the age of his times. Before Kalhana, the history of Kashmir had been written 11 times and Kalhana had read all of them thoroughly. But none of these 11 versions is traceable today. That is why the importance of Kalhana's work acquires added significance.

Kalhana has provided a graphic description of the demise of King Harsha. At the time Harsha was assassinated, a faithful servant by the name of 'Mukt' was with him. After the death of his master, he somehow managed to escape from the clutches of the enemies. It was he who narrated the details of the King's assassination to Kalhana.

Kalhana has written about his uncle, Kanak, that he used to live in Kashi, but the place of his birth was Parihaspur. It seems that Kalhana's father too lived in Parihaspur and Kalhana possibly, was born there.

In Ramayana, we read that before departing for heaven, Lord Rama had called his sons and nephews to divide the kingdom between them. As per the arrangement, he gave the kingdoms of Lavpuri and Kushpuri in Kashmir to both his sons—Luv and Kush. In his description of the kings of Kashmir, Kalhana makes a mention of both these kings too.

Very little is known about Kalhana's personal life. Intensive research on the subject is being carried out. Whatever it may be, this immortal apostle of literature will continue to be a source of Kashmir's history.

JAYADEVA

—Jagdish Goyal

SANSKRIT is one of the greatest classical languages of the world. Today, in our country the number of people who speak Sanskrit is less, but at one point of time, Sanskrit used to be the language of reading and writing for the civilized people. Jayadeva was one of the most mellifluous poets in this language. It is a matter of regret that Jayadeva composed only one poetic work. This voluminous work is known as *Gita Govinda*. Jayadeva has become immortal through this work. Very few poets, have achieved so much fame from just one poetic work, not only in Sanskrit, but even in any other language of the world. But *Gita Govinda* is not just poetry, it is a pot (ewer) of nectar.

Jayadeva was born in Kendubilva, a small village of Bengal. This place is situated in modern-day Birbhum district of West Bengal. The exact year of Jayadeva's birth cannot be told accurately, but it is estimated that he was born around the 12th century. In those days, King Lakshmansingh of Sena dynasty was ruling Bengal and Delhi's throne was occupied by a king of the Chauhan dynasty.

The name of Jayadeva's father was Bhojdeva and that of his mother—Ramdevi. His parents died, when Jayadeva was very young. Thus, he was robbed of parental affection at a very tender age. This must have definitely had a profound impact on his life.

Not much is known about his childhood. About his marriage, only this much is known that he was married to a girl called Padmavati. The story of his marriage is very interesting. It is said that one day Padmavati's father saw a dream. In the dream, Lord Jagannath told her father to marry off Padmavati to Jayadeva. Following this, Padmavati's father gave his daughter's hand to Jayadeva, under a tree in Puri.

Padmavati too was extremely pious in her thoughts. Hence, the marriage between the two proved to be a happy one. They lived together harmoniously. Both loved each other so much that one could not live without the other. Padmavati cast a profound influence on Jayadeva's life. Jayadeva derived a lot of inspiration for writing poetry from Padmavati.

After some time, Jayadeva went to see Vrindavan and its adjoining areas. Krishna had spent his childhood in Vrindavan. He played with 'Gopis' (village belles) here and it was at the same place that he had fallen in love with Radha. When Krishna grew up, he first went from Vrindavan to Mathura and from Mathura, onward to Dwarka. In *Gita Govinda*, Jayadeva had written sweet tales about the antics and pranks of Krishna. On seeing river Yamuna at Vrindavan, the trees, creepers and groves had made Jayadeva forget all about himself. At a later stage, the same glimpses were to come to life in his work—*Gita Govinda*.

On his return to Bengal, Jayadeva began to adorn the royal court of Bengal. He was one of the five jewels at the royal court. Both the King and the Queen held him in high esteem. But on one occasion, when Jayadeva had gone out, the Queen played a prank. She told Padmavati that Jayadeva was no longer alive in this world. Padmavati loved Jayadeva a lot. On hearing the news, she was so overwhelmed with grief that she fainted and fell down on the floor and passed away.

On his return, when Jayadeva came to know of all that had happened, he too was heart-broken. He decided that he would not live with the King any longer. He left the royal court and settled down in his village. He spent rest of his life at his village in solitude. After his death, festival used to be celebrated on his birthday every year in Kendubilva for many centuries. In the festival, the songs of Jayadeva were sung in the night with great reverence.

Jayadeva had composed his unique work at Puri. It revolved around the love play of Radha and Krishna in the form of songs. It is said that a love-epic like *Gita Govinda*, is not to be found in any other Indian language. The verses of *Gita Govinda* have been sung with devotion by people in royal courts and temples. It appears,

as if the sweet tinkle of trinkets emerge from each and every line composed in *Gita Govinda*. Sample a verse—

Sakhi tells, O Radha! the cool and soft southern breeze softly embraces the quivering vines of Deva Kusuma (Lavanga Lata) and carries its aroma to all living beings. The creeper laden garden huts become an amorous haunt with the cooing cuckoos and humming honey bees. In the richness of the spring when the blooms and fragrance of colourful flowers arouse the senses in all beings, Hari roams here and dances with young beauties and sports with them in the richness of Spring. O Radha! it is a very cruel time for forlorn lovers staying away from the loved ones.

Gita Govinda has only three characters—Radha, Krishna and a friend of Radha, who takes messages from Radha to Krishna and vice versa. When Krishna is separated from Radha and Radha is annoyed with Krishna, both begin to yearn for each other and the pangs of separation trouble them. Both of them sulk, and outwardly show as if they do not care for each other, but in the heart of their hearts they know that they cannot live without each other. In such circumstances, Radha's friend conveys their true feelings to each other.

This story of love between Radha and Krishna has been described beautifully by the poet. The very first couplet of *Gita Govinda* says that Krishna was busy playing, dancing and prancing around with 'Gopis' (village belles) the whole day. When evening set in, it was time to return home. Krishna was all of 8 years old then. It was increasingly getting dark and it was not advisable to send back Krishna alone. So, Radha accompanied Krishna. Radha and Krishna were walking alone on the solitary path meandering through the vines and groves on the banks of river Yamuna. The bond of love had tied its knot there and then.

After this, the poet goes on to describe 'Raas' (a dance performed in a circle). Radha feels jealous on seeing Krishna dancing with other 'Gopis (cowherd's wives)'. Radha gets annoyed and retires to a nearby grove with a heavy heart. Radha's friend follows her instantly. Radha lets out her heart's secret desire to her—"I want to meet Krishna in private".

On the other hand, Krishna becomes restless at not being able to spot Radha amongst the 'Gopis'. He cannot concentrate on the dance. Sitting all by himself in a grove, Krishna begins to repent—"why did I annoy Radha?" It is then that Radha's friend divulges their secret feelings to each other. Radha is also yearning for me—this thought gladdens Krishna and in the end, both the lovers get united.

The portrait of love of Radha and Krishna, as sketched by Jayadeva in *Gita Govinda* is not worldly, it is divine, because the life and times of Krishna that he has described, was when Krishna was only an eight-year old child. The 'Gopis' of Braj who were attracted to the tunes of his flute, were no ordinary women. They were overcome by a strange madness. They were so immersed in Krishna's love, that irrespective of their appearance, or wherever they were, they would drop whatever work they were doing and follow the call of the flute. The stream of devotion for Krishna that flowed through *Gita Govinda*, had an impact on innumerable poets later on. Vidyapati and Chandidas are prominent among them. Jayadeva's influence on Vidyapati was so profound that it, gave him the title of 'Abhinav Jayadeva (Recent Jayadeva)'. Although Jayadeva's verses gained popularity throughout India, he was particularly popular in South India, where people still chant Jayadeva with fondness even today.

The verses of *Gita Govinda* have a magic-like effect. An incident about this is so narrated –it was early morning, the sun had not come out as yet. The sweet fragrance from the cluster of blossoming mangoes was wafting through the mild, spring breeze blowing across. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was at that time, spending the last days of his life at Puri. He was slowly walking towards Jagannath temple, when a sweet song reaches his ears. The song was that of Jayadeva.....

'The cool and soft southern breeze softly embraces....

The song continued and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu kept listening to it, engrossed. He got so immersed in the song that he began to run in the direction, from which the song was being sung. He wanted to embrace the singer, when the people pulled him back.

The singer was a 'Devadasi' (women who had dedicated themselves in the service of God) and Chaitanya, a monk.

Jayadeva impressed not only poets and saints, but even painters were deeply influenced by *Gita Govinda*. Painters from far off places—from the valley of Jammu and Kangra at the other end of India—drew paintings based on the story of *Gita Govinda*. These paintings are extremely beautiful and are known as Basohli style of paintings. Basohli was a small principality located within the hilly state of Punjab. The Queen of Basohli—Queen Malini was very fond of paintings. It is said that these paintings were made at her instance.

Gita Govinda is a poetic work, but elements of drama are also found in it. *Gita Govinda* is liked not only by Indians, but also by foreigners. It has been translated into prose in several foreign languages which include—Latin, English, German and French.

BASAVA

—Dashrath Sharma

BASAVESHWAR, or Basava, was the son of a Brahmin scholar—Madiraj, a follower of 'Aradhya' community. His mother's name was Madalambe. He was born in a village called Bagewadi, in Bijapur district of Mysore State. His maternal uncle—Baldeva was a minister of King Bijjalraya of Kalyan (1157-1167 A.D). From Bagewadi, Basava reached Kalyan and learnt handling royal proceedings under his tutelage. When Baldeva passed away, Bijjalraya was so impressed with the dexterity demonstrated by Basava in handling royal work, that he made Basava his minister. The marriage of his sister to the King further strengthened the relationship.

Basava was of an extremely religious disposition. In his spare time, he used to serve the saints. The royal treasury was under his control. A lot of money from it was spent on Shaiva saints. It did not in any way deplete the treasury much, but Basava's detractors started poisoning the King's ears. Gradually, the King's heart too underwent a change. The same person who was his friend once became his enemy. He tried to get Basava arrested, but Basava managed to somehow escape from Kalyan. The King deputed a few men to arrest Basava. Basava defeated them easily. The King then himself marched at the head of a large army to proceed against him. However, due to Basava's expert tactics, people had already begun taking sides with him. Bijjalraya was defeated in the war. After a few days, he persuaded Basava to return to Kalyan. Basava again began worshipping the devotees of Shiva and strengthened the roots of 'Veer Shaiva' sect.

Some Historians consider Basava to be the founder of 'Veer Shaiva' community. However, followers of 'Veer Shaiva' religion consider it to be a very ancient one. Basava was only its staunch supporter. It is written in 'Basava Purana' that once Sage Narada

went to Lord Shiva and said, "there are followers of several communities on Earth. Devotees of Vishnu and devotees of Buddhist and Jain all the religions are there. However, there are no worshippers of Shiva anywhere. During ancient times, Vishweshvaradhya, Panditaradhya, Ekoram, etc. had established the worship of Shiva, but there is no such Guru (Teacher) at present." On hearing this, Lord Shiva ordered Nandi to take an incarnation on Earth and propagate the principles of 'Veer Shaivism'.

This tradition appears to be an ordinary one. The principles of 'Veer Shaivism' had been propounded, possibly before the birth of Basava, but it was in need of a good supporter. Jains exercised quite a bit of influence in the region around Karnataka. The number of Vaishnavites too must have been a decent one. Shaiviites too were there, but many amongst them worshipped all gods and goddesses. The number of such Shaiviites who had single-minded faith in devotion to Shiva, was less.

The principles and conduct of those who adhered to Basava's views on 'Veer Shaivism' were somewhat different from others. Lord Shiva is known as 'Sachchidananda'. By definition, his name translates as, plane (Sthal). As a result of the vibration of this force (Shakti), this plane acquires two forms—'Lingsthal' and 'Angasthal'. 'Lingsthal' is the supreme, adorable Lord Shiva. 'Angsthal' is the creature. Similarly, force is also divided into two forms. In proximity to Rudra, it exists in the form of time (Kaal) and with creature, it is present in the form of devotion. It is through this devotion that the creature detaches itself from material world and in the end, achieves oneness with the Lord (Shiva). 'Linga' is Lord Shiva himself and is His manifestation. One can meditate on him in several ways. These philosophical thoughts on 'Veer Shaivism' have been propounded by Shripati, in the form of a commentary written by him on Brahmasutras—titled *Shreekar*.

In 'Veer Shaiva' community, the sacred thread ceremony has been replaced by initiation. The 'mantra (incantation)' for them is—*Om Namah Shivaay* (I bow to Lord Shiva) and instead of the sacred thread, they sport the 'Linga'. It is due to this conduct that 'Veer Shaivas' are also known as 'Lingayats'. Both men and women have the right to initiation and to sport the 'Linga'.

Several philosophical thoughts and conduct of 'Veer Shaiva' probably existed before the times of Basava. To strengthen and to make it more widespread from a politician's perspective, Basava must have brought about some changes to the 'Veer Shaiva' religion. It would not be illogical to compare these changes with those brought about in Sikhism. The sermons through which Guru Nanak Dev addressed the masses, remain its soul. They are still binding on every Sikh. Still, the tenth Guru, Govind Singh altered its very form by effecting some changes and imparted a new direction to it. Basava's task was somewhat similar.

The 'Lingayats' of these times are not idol-worshippers. For them, the 'Linga' is reverential and also the Guru. It is not imperative for them to visit temples. For them, their five 'mutts' (monasteries), associated with their Adi Acharyas are the most acceptable ones. They are—Ekoram's 'mutt' in Kedarnath, Panditaradhya's 'mutt' at Shreeshail, Revan's 'mutt' at Ballehalli, Marul's 'mutt' at a place called Ujjini in Bellary state and Vishwaradhya in Kashi. Usually, every Lingayat-dominated village has a 'mutt' and they are normally associated with one 'mutt' or the other. Lingayats are divided into two categories—'Jangam' and his other followers—Lingayats. 'Jangams' are further divided into—detached 'Jangams', who adhere to celibacy and reside in 'mutts' and those 'Jangams' who are householders, perform the task of worship and initiation. Lingayats are vegetarians. They do not consume intoxicants. Widow marriages are permitted while child marriages are prohibited. They also believe that liberation within one's lifetime is possible. They do not believe in caste system.

It is difficult to say how many of these principles and conduct are the creations of Basava. However, several scholars reckon that Basava attempted to make Lingayat religion different from Brahmanism in several ways. It is possible that women might have got several rights, courtesy Basava. People belonging to Brahmin, Jain communities levelled allegations and considered women to be impure. In the Lingayat community, women have the same rights as men, and they are equally pure. There could have been no better way of bringing women into the fold of 'Veer

Shaiva' religion. The path to liberation was open for all the castes, including Shudras and Vaishyas and everyone had the right to get initiated through 'Shiv Mantra' and attain liberation. The Brahmanical religion, riddled by casteism, could not withstand Jainism, but in competition with 'Veer Shaiva' community, Jainism had to beat a retreat. 'Veer Shaivas' neither eat meat, nor do they consume intoxicants. Hence, it was not difficult for the Jains to follow the path of Shaivas. According to tradition, it is popular that Basava even used force against the Jains. With a view to keep Lingayats strong for the future too, the connection of Lingayats with several 'mutts' all over India might have been the work of Basava. One British scholar feels that Basava had borrowed the system of social consolidation from the Jains. But in reality, this was an ancient tradition in the country. The community of Shakti worshippers was being organized at several seats of 'Shakti' cult. The man who established monism, Shri Adi Shankaracharya, had established 'mutts' in all the four corners of India. For Basava, the ideals laid down by Shankaracharya was enough. Basava had not only organized a new society, but he also took care to see that 'Veer Shaivism' would have all such means at its disposal, which could meet their requirements.

Basava was a man true to his word and a diligent worker. He understood the requirements of his times and tried to meet them. His views can be called revolutionary to some extent. Basava tried to rid the caste-ridden Hindu community of casteism. He also preached that God is one and does not have a tangible form. He gave rights to the women and despite being a Brahmin by birth, he attacked the special privileges of Brahmins. The present condition of Lingayat community is an apparent witness to the fact that Basava had created a solid foundation for his task of constructing a society. It is very likely that Basava would have made some mistakes. It is also possible that he might have undertaken some tasks, which cannot be said to be absolutely justified. However, the importance of the constructive work done by him is far more crucial, and only on the basis of that Basava has a place among the great religious leaders of India.

Basava's words are very famous and popular all over Karnataka. People of all castes and religions look at his words with reverence. Basava used very simple Kannada language to propagate his ideals and principles. Gradually, Basava's words gained so much popularity that he carved out a niche for himself in Kannada literature. Although Basava devoted his life to spiritual development, still the thoughts expressed by him in social and economic matters, also were revolutionary to a large extent. He obliterated caste discrimination, held everyone equal in the eyes of God and accorded an exalted status to women in the society. Some of his words are as follows:

God does not love sound, God also does not love Vedas, he loves devotion. Do not steal, do not kill, do not tell a lie, do not criticize enemies and do not be jealous of anyone.

Oh Lord! Make me lame, so that I may not walk or move, make me blind, so that I may not look here and there, make me deaf, so that I may not listen to anything. Do all this so that I may remember all those who seek shelter at your feet.

KAMBAN

—T.N. Seetharaman

YOU must have heard of Goswami Tulsidas. He had composed Ramayana in Hindi. In South India too, there was a poet called Kamban, who had composed Ramayana in Tamil language.

Kamban was born in a village called Tiruvalundur, under Chola kingdom in Tamil Nadu, in South India. Kamban is believed to have lived in the 12th century. However, some scholars are of the view that Kamban lived in the 9th century.

Not much information is available on Kamban. His real name too is not known till now. Kamban was his pen name. His parents had passed away in his childhood and Kamban was orphaned. There was no one among Kamban's relatives, who could have brought him up. One of his relatives, named Vannular left the young Kamban near the house of Saddaiyappa Vallal in Tiravennai, Nallur (a place in Arcot district in South India).

Saddaiyappa Vallal was a very generous man. He was a good and a rich farmer. His ancestors used to carry on their trade through the Pondicherry harbour route.

Once day when Saddaiyappa Vallal came out of his house, he saw the young Kamban standing near the door. Saddaiyappa Vallal immediately held Kamban by the hand and took him inside. From that day, Kamban started living in Saddaiyappa Vallal's house. Kamban used to come and go with Saddaiyappa Vallal's sons and also looked after them.

Kamban began his studies along with Saddaiyappa Vallal's sons. He was bright in studies since his childhood. Seeing Kamban's love for education, Saddaiyappa Vallal started teaching Kamban along with his sons. Some years later, Kamban became educated and became a scholar. He also started composing poetry. Spotting his talent for writing poetry, Saddaiyappa Vallal began to offer Kamban a seat right next to him.

Saddaiyappa Vallal invariably used to visit the court of the Chola king in South India during those days. Kamban too used to accompany Saddaiyappa Vallal to the royal court. One day, impressed by Kamban's poem, the Chola King made him his court poet. From that day onwards, Kamban stayed at the royal court and added to the grandeur of the court by composing beautiful poems.

Charmed by Kamban's poems, both—Chola King and Saddaiyappa Vallal, asked Kamban to translate Valmiki's Ramayana into his mother tongue—Tamil. Kamban was a strict Vaishnavite also. This fact is reflected clearly in his work. Agreeing to the King's suggestion, Kamban composed the story of Ramayana in Tamil language. Kamban's Ramayana comprises about 12,000 verses.

The poet Kamban, authored several great works, besides Ramayana. However, it was with the composition of Ramayana that his fame spread far and wide in all directions. Scholars and emperors gave him the title of 'Kavi Samraat' (Emperor among poets).

Till the very end, Kamban did not forget his mentor, Saddaiyappa Vallal. Even before he breathed his last, Kamban was praising Saddaiyappa Vallal.

Both, Goswami Tulsidasji and 'Kavi Samraat' Kamban, have extensively commented through the Ramayana on Indian culture, the duties of people, duties among brothers, duties of the King and his subjects and duties of husband and wife.

One peculiar characteristic of Ramayana composed by Kamban is that the poet has portrayed the character of 'Nishad' kings very brightly. Guh, who lives on the banks of river Ganga is a leader of Nishad and is very courageous. He does not belittle himself because he is a 'Shudra' and infact, he has alot of self-respect. We generally visualize Lakshman as an angry Kshatriya prince, who is ready to sacrifice even his life for his elder brother, Rama. However, in Kamban's Ramayana, talking of Guh, Lakshman tells Ram, "Oh accomplished victor! A person with an even more affectionate behaviour than a mother has come to meet you".

Guh also loves Rama, just as a mother loves her son. He wonders—the same Rama, who never walked during day, whose orders were obeyed by servants too readily, how will he stay alone at night? What will he do, if he feels thirsty at night? Who will fetch water for him? Such concerns and worries trouble Guh's mind.

His love for Rama has so much of an impact on Rama's mother, Kaushalya, that when Rama returns to Ayodhya after serving his exile in the forest, she tells her four sons—it was good that Rama and Lakshman went to the forest, for you got a virtuous friend like Guh. Now along with Guh, all of you should foster this kingdom.

What a supernatural love there was between Rama and Nishad. In his Ramayana, Kamban has thus, exposed the false row between upper and lower castes to set up a beautiful example of love between two human beings.

Just like the moon shines in the sky, poet Kamban shines similarly in Tamil literature. Kamban's Ramayana is known as 'Kambaramayana'. Some glimpses of it are being given below.

Kamban describes the city of Ayodhya in 'Baal Kaand'. He considers the city of Ayodhya to be even bigger than heaven. In his imagination, there is no heaven other than Ayodhya. Just have a look at an interpretation of his feelings in a verse:

'It has been said in the Vedas that people who do good deeds go to heaven. In Ayodhya, Maryada Purushottam Ramchandraji (the superior one among the noble) is considered to be the greatest in performing good deeds. His subjects were similar to Ramchandraji, as mentioned in the saying "as is the King, so shall be the subjects". Ayodhya was being ruled by a man, as superior as King Rama, hence, there can be no heaven greater than Ayodhya. In short, when the master of heaven—Shrimadnarayan himself takes incarnation as Rama to inhabit Ayodhya, then who would be left in heaven? Hence, in reality, Ayodhya only is the heaven.'

Take another example:

'No one was rich in Ayodhya, for nobody was poor, it means that inhabitants of Ayodhya did not even know about the existence of terms like rich and poor. All of them were equal.

In Ayodhya, no person was powerful, for there was no brave person to face them, implying that everyone's strength was equal. The people there had not heard of weakness, or timidity.

In Ayodhya, truthfulness was not required, as there was no one who told lies, meaning that people of Ayodhya did not know of falsehood. Each and every person spoke the truth.

'In Ayodhya, there were no knowledgeable people because no one was ignorant, which means that everyone was knowledgeable.

Hence, what is Ayodhya? A conceptualization of an ideal, Utopian society.'

Kamban was a devotee of Saint Nammalvar, who was a follower of Vaishnava community. His Ramayana and Valmiki's Ramayana contain differences at several places. In his Ramayana, Kamban particularly described the Tamil (Dravidian) civilization.

It is said that Kamban had authored eleven other books, besides 'Ramayana'. The prominent ones among them are—'Shadgopar Andadi', 'Saraswati Andadi', 'Aiyur Aillupat', 'Shillai Aillupat' etc. However, the work which made him immortal was 'Ramayana'.

Kamban enjoys the same status in Tamil literature, as is enjoyed by Valmiki in Sanskrit literature. Not only the Tamil speaking, but all Indians will always be proud of this great poet of our country.

PRITHVIRAJ

—Shreenath Singh

ABOUT 800 years ago, Delhi was being ruled by a glorious king called Prithviraj Chauhan. Prithviraj Chauhan was an extremely able and brave king and his might was acknowledged by kings from far and wide.

Prithviraj was born in the clan of Chauhans of Shakambhari. The Chauhans of Shakambhari had always been famous for their valour. Prithviraj's grandfather, Arnoraj, had been married to Kaanchandevi, daughter of Jai Singh, a Chalukyan king from Gujarat. Apart from Kaanchandevi, Arnoraj had a second wife, Sudhwa. Arnoraj had three sons from Queen Sudhwa and one son was born of Kaanchandevi. Kaanchandevi's son was called Someshwar. Prithviraj was Someshwar's son.

After Arnoraj's death, one of his sons, Vishaldev, also known as Vigraharaj became the king. Vigraharaj was an extremely able king. He ruled for nearly ten years. Vigraharaj laid the foundations of a huge empire, by winning over lesser kings. He even defeated a Tomar king and included Delhi within his empire. His kingdom extended from Haansi in Hissar district in erstwhile Punjab to Saharanpur (in Uttar Pradesh) and Jaipur (Rajasthan) in the north. After Vigraharaj's demise, two more kings succeeded him. They were succeeded by Someshwar.

Someshwar married Karpoordevi, a princess of Haihay dynasty. This princess bore him two sons. The elder one was named Prithviraj and the younger one, Hariraj.

Prithviraj was very promising. Since his childhood, he was trained in horse-riding and warfare, along with administration of a state.

Prithviraj's father, Someshwar was an extremely able and brave king. In his kingdom, the subjects were very happy and prosperous. He wanted that his son, Prithviraj, too should become an able king

like him. Thus, Prithviraj was made the crown prince at a very young age and he was given charge of royal work. Prithviraj was still a child, when King Someshwar passed away. In 1177 A.D, Prithviraj ascended his father's throne.

Prithviraj was still of a tender age and could not have handled the affairs of the State. Hence, his mother, Karpoordevi took over the reins of administration on behalf of her son. Karpoordevi organized the affairs with a great deal of expertise for one year. Kadambvaas was Prithviraj's minister. Kadambvaas was a faithful and an experienced person. Karpoordevi appointed a brave warrior, Bhuvnayak Malla as the 'Senapati' (commander). Bhuvnayak Malla organized the army very efficiently and within a few days, defeated kings of the neighbouring States and vanquished all the enemies of Prithviraj Chauhan. In the meantime, Karpoordevi made the capital of her State, 'Ajaymeru' (present day Ajmer) highly prosperous.

After running the administration under the tutelage of his mother for one year, Prithviraj completely took over the reins of the administration. Soon after that, he had to face problems from all directions. In 1178 A.D, news filtered in that having crossed the desert from Kutch, the Muslim ruler, Shahabuddin Ghorī was advancing towards Gujarat.

Shahabuddin Ghorī, on the strength of his massive army attacked the Chauhans of Marwar and captured the capital, Nadol. After this, he began making preparations to move towards Gujarat. When Prithviraj heard the news that Shahabuddin had captured Nadol and destroyed the Someshwar temple, he was very angry and got ready to fight Shahabuddin. However, Prithviraj's minister, Kadambvaas was extremely clever. He convinced Prithviraj to let Shahabuddin fight the army of Gujarat and get tired. When his army would be fatigued, attacking them at that stage would ensure a victory.

Prithviraj took his minister's advice and acted with patience. After some time, information came that the king of Gujarat had inflicted a crushing defeat on Shahabuddin Ghorī. This piece of news made Prithviraj very happy.

Around the same time, Prithviraj's cousin, Nagarjun revolted against him. Seeing that Prithviraj was young, Nagarjun thought that he could easily dethrone him and become the king. But despite being young in age, Prithviraj was extremely courageous and able. He himself headed an army and attacked Nagarjun and surrounded him from all sides. Nagarjun succeeded in saving his life and fled, but Prithviraj slaughtered his army.

After some time, Prithviraj turned his attention towards expanding his kingdom. He attacked Rewari, Bhiwani and the adjoining areas. This region was being ruled by the head of Bhadanak dynasty. The Bhadanak charged with a huge army of elephants, but he could not stand upto Prithviraj. Prithviraj annexed the entire region and made it a part of his kingdom.

Prithviraj defeated many other smaller kings and established control over their kingdoms. His most famous battle was with a king of Chandelas of Jejakabhukti, Parmaal, in 1182 A.D. The Jejakabhukti region is now known as Bundelkhand.

It is said that in King Parmaal's army, there were two chivalrous brothers, Alha and Udal. They faced Prithviraj's army very bravely. A fierce battle ensued. Several major chieftains from both the sides perished. Alha and Udal too were killed and in the end, Prithviraj came out victorious. The unprecedented valour shown by Alha and Udal was such that the talk of their bravery spread far and wide. Even today, at several places, in villages and towns, people sing Alha. 'Alha' is a poetic epic written in a highly spirited language, in which scores of incidents of the valour of Alha and Udal have been narrated. The epic also narrates about the war between Alha and Udal, and Prithviraj.

Having defeated the Chandel king, Parmaal, and annexing his capital, Mahoba, Prithviraj turned his attention towards Gujarat. Gujarat was a very powerful kingdom in those times. At that time, a king named Bhim-II was ruling there. Around 1187 A.D, the king of Gujarat accepted the supremacy of Prithviraj's might and expressed a desire to befriend him. Both the kings arrived at a truce.

Prithviraj's kingdom extended from Hissar and Sirhind in North-

West till Delhi in North. His capital was 'Ajaymeru', or Ajmer. The southern limits of Prithviraj's kingdom bordered the states of Mewar and Nadol in South and those of Gwalior and Kannauj on the eastern borders. During Prithviraj's time, Yamini kings ruled Lahore and the borders of their kingdoms touched the borders of Prithviraj's kingdom. About 6 lakh inscriptions written during Prithviraj's time and some coins made of gold and silver have been found.

Prithviraj was a brave victor and a war-loving king, but he also respected poets a lot. In his court, there lived a talented poet from Kashmir, Jayaanak who wrote a lyrical epic, *Prithviraj Vijay* on the wars between Prithviraj and the other kings. Ashadhar, a Jain scholar also lived in Prithviraj's kingdom and authored several books.

Prithviraj could not rule peacefully for long. The danger of foreign invasion knocked at India's door. We have already read about Shahabuddin's fate, whom the King of Gujarat had defeated and turned him back in 1178 A.D. The same Ghori dethroned the last Yamini king, Khursab Malik and himself ascended the throne of Ghazni. Now, he made large-scale preparations for launching an attack on India and establishing an empire of his own. It has already been mentioned before that the kingdom of Yamini Sultan of Ghazni extended upto Lahore in India. First of all, Ghori marched from Ghazni with a huge army and attacked Sirhind (then known as Tabarhind). Sirhind at that time fell under Prithviraj's kingdom. Ghori captured the fort at Tabarhind and leaving its defence to one of his lieutenants, Malik Ziauddin, along with 1,200 mounted soldiers returned to Ghazni again. His intention this time was to return with increased preparation.

The control over Sirhind led to discontentment among the feudal lords of Prithviraj. Prithviraj used to live in Ajmer. But one of his feudal lords, Govindraj, was the Governor of Delhi. Govindraj despatched his son, Chandraraj to Prithviraj in Ajmer, to inform him that having entered Prithviraj's kingdom, Shahabuddin had captured the fort at Sirhind and had inflicted large-scale devastation and destruction.

When Prithviraj came to know of the trouble being faced by

Rajput kings and petty feudal lords, he became very angry and started preparing to help them against Shahabuddin. He immediately set out from Ajmer to crush Shahabuddin.

In 1190-91, A.D, 80 miles from Delhi, in the plains of Tarain, a massive army subservient to Prithviraj, including all Rajput kingdoms, attacked Shahabuddin's army. Prithviraj's army comprised of two lakh horsemen and 3,000 elephants. Shahabuddin too had a huge army.

The Battle of Tarain is a glorious example of the valour of Rajputs, in history. A fierce battle broke out. However, the Rajputs soon cut off the left and the right flanks of Shahabuddin's army. The Muslim army began to run helter-skelter and one chieftain even advised Shahabuddin to flee from the battlefield, but Shahabuddin was an extremely courageous man. Instead of fleeing, he encouraged his army and motivated them to move forward and brandishing his sword, pounced on the Rajput army. When the Governor of Delhi, Veekhar Govindraj saw Shahabuddin coming, he obstructed Shahabuddin's way by bringing his elephant in the way. Seeing Govindraj in front of him, Shahabuddin hurled a spear at him, as a result of which Govindraj lost two front teeth. Despite being injured, Govindraj, in return, threw a spear, which injured Shahabuddin badly. He was about to fall off his horse, when a chieftain, risking his life, came speeding on a horse, and carried Shahabuddin off the battlefield on his horse. As soon as Shahabuddin fled from the battlefield, his army also gave up and ran away.

In the battle of Tarain, the general of Prithviraj's army, Skand, showed tremendous bravery and it was due to his ability that the Indian army achieved victory. After this, Prithviraj surged forward and surrounded the fort of Sirhind. The Muslim chief of the fort, Ziauddin, defended the fort for 13 months, but vanquished in the end, and Prithviraj's rule over Punjab was re-established.

Despite losing the battle, Shahabuddin did not lose hope. On reaching Ghazni, he again collected a huge army and started full-fledged preparations to take revenge on Prithviraj. He brought together 1,10,000 soldiers and reached Lahore, via Peshawar and Multan.

When Prithviraj came to know of Shahabuddin's intentions of a second attack, he too started making preparations. He sent a word to all Rajput kings to join hands with him to mount a challenge to the foreigner—Shahabuddin. At his behest, several Indian kings joined his ranks, along with their armies. Prithviraj organized an army of 3 lakh horsemen, 3,000 elephants and innumerable foot soldiers.

Prithviraj once again camped at Tarain with his massive army and began to wait for Shahabuddin. Shahabuddin captured Sirhind once again and began to move towards Tarain. In an attempt to prevent a massacre in the ensuing war, Prithviraj sent a message to the Sultan that if he so wanted, Shahabuddin could continue to retain his control over Sirhind and Punjab, Prithviraj would not have any objection to it, but he should not move forward any further. This gave Shahabuddin an occasion to play a trick. He sent a message to Prithviraj that he would send a reply after consulting his brother. It was decided that the war would not commence, till the reply was received and a decision was arrived at.

However, Shahabuddin had deceit in his heart. Thinking that the war had been averted, Rajputs began to indulge in festivities. Shahabuddin ordered a small portion of his army to remain in front of Prithviraj's army and he with the remaining army, reached behind Prithviraj's army during the night. Dawn had not yet broken out completely, when he attacked the hapless Rajput army all of a sudden.

The attack caused confusion within the Rajput army. Prithviraj was a brave man. He had not expected such deceit. The army he had organized, began disintegrating, but with a lot of patience and courage and with help from his infantry, Prithviraj defeated and pushed back Shahabuddin's army.

Now, Prithviraj re-organized his army. On the other side, Shahabuddin divided his infantry into four divisions and attacked Prithviraj from all the directions. A fierce battle raged till afternoon, in which about one lakh Rajput soldiers perished. Prithviraj himself too was supposedly killed in this war.

The Second Battle of Tarain commenced in 1192 A.D. This Indian war has immense significance in history, for it spelt the end of Chauhan dynasty. Not only this, Prithviraj's defeat cast an extremely harmful impact on the entire country and Indian kings lost all hope. It now became easy for Shahabuddin to establish his empire in India.

Prithviraj was an extremely capable and a brave general and an efficient administrator of his times. He had unified several small Rajput kings of North India. But Prithviraj was not an able politician. Had he made effective arrangements to protect the western frontiers, Shahabuddin would not have succeeded in entering India, and the Muslim rule under Ghazni had not been established in India.

With the end of Prithviraj, the sun had set on the Chauhan dynasty. One of the feudal lords of Shahabuddin, Qutubuddin was appointed the Governor of Delhi. Qutubuddin laid the foundations of a new kingdom in Delhi. Later on, he occupied Ajmer and thus, the last vestige of Chauhan dynasty was also destroyed.

MADHAVACHARYA

—R.N. Tiwari

IN Kannada region in South India, a Brahmin called Madhyageh, used to live in a village near Udipi. He owned some land, which provided him sustenance. Madhyageh was a great scholar. Due to his erudition, people called him 'Bhatt'.

Madhyageh's wife, Vedavati, was a good-natured and beautiful woman. Vedavati bore a daughter and two sons. Unfortunately, both the sons passed away at a very young age. Madhyageh began to get worried as to who would carry forward his family name, if he did not have a son. For twelve years, Madhyageh and his wife offered regular prayers with utmost devotion at the temple in Udipi and kept praying for a son as a boon. On the day of Dussehra in 1197 A.D, Vedavati gave birth to a son. He was named Vasudev. Later on, the same Vasudev became famous by the name of Madhavacharya throughout India.

Several stories about Vasudev's childhood are well-known even today. According to one when Vasudev was five years old, he went missing from his house. His parents looked for him everywhere, but there was no trace of him. Three days later, Madhyageh came to know that Vasudev was in Udipi temple. Both the parents went running to the temple. At the temple, there was a mass of devotees in front of the statue of Lord Ananteshwar. There the young Vasudev was found guiding the congregation on the proper way of worshiping Lord Vishnu, as described in the *Shastras*. After this incident, there was no doubt left in anyone's mind that Vasudev was no ordinary child, but God incarnate.

Some time after this incident, the sacred thread ceremony was conducted for Vasudev and he was sent for studies to the village school. Vasudev would be in the forefront in playing games—wrestling, jumping, skipping and swimming. The strength of his young body used to leave people amazed and they affectionately called

him 'Bhim'. It was perhaps because of the uncommon reserves of strength of his body that he began to be called an incarnation of Pawansut (Hanuman) and later on, people even began to believe it.

But whereas Vasudev was way ahead of the children of his age in sporting activities, he lagged behind in studies. In the end, the teacher abandoned all efforts to persuade him to follow the right path. Vasudev too left the school and returned to his house.

Now, Vasudev began to practice self-studies and very soon acquired all the knowledge pertaining to *Vedas* and *Shastras*. He became proficient in logic and grammar.

After leaving the school, Vasudev showed keenness in spiritualism. He had no desire to establish a household. He wanted to spend the entire life in propagating religion, after studying the *Vedas*, *Vedangas* and *Shastras*. At the age of 15, he took a decision to renounce the world.

To attain renunciation, a *Guru* (teacher) is required. After an intense search, he met a saint called Achyutpreksha. Vasudev chose him as his *Guru*.

However, before seeking renunciation, one more important thing was required, and that was the permission of his parents. He was the only son of Madhyageh and Vedavati. He was hell-bent on seeking renunciation. This made Madhyageh and Vedavati extremely sad. They refused permission to Vasudev to seek renunciation. They said, "if you take renunciation, who will perform the last rites when we die? Without the final rites being performed, we will have to live in the ghost form". However, Vasudev had already decided to renounce. In the end, he comforted them by saying that they would have another son. After a few days, Vedavati gave birth to another son. He was named Vishnuteerth. Till Vishnuteerth was not born, he did not renounce. However, after the birth of his younger brother, there was no one to stop him. He got initiated in to renunciation with a lot of fanfare. Only after becoming a monk he was given the title of Poornapragya and people started calling him by this name, instead of Vasudev.

Now, Poornapragya began to live with his teacher—Guru

Achyutpreksha in the monastery (mutt) and commenced his studies. Achyutpreksha was a great scholar of *Vedanta*. Poornapragya too had a profound understanding of *Vedas*, *Vedangas* and *Shastras*. Now, he got an opportunity to study and reflect on *Vedanta*. However, after some time, Poornapragya began to have difference of opinion with his teacher. Often, he would have debates with Achyutpreksha. Gradually, Poornapragya's talent began to blossom. His ability and learning began to be talked about far and wide. In the beginning, Achyutpreksha did not agree with the logic given by Poornapragya, but he too was forced to concede that Poornapragya's way of thinking was an entirely new one and unique and his arguments carried a lot of weight.

Achyutpreksha made him the head of the monastery. Hence, Poornapragya sat on the highest seat of the monastery of Ananteshwar temple. After becoming the head of the monastery, his name was changed from Poornapragya to Anandteerth, or Madhavacharya. Later on, his name Madhavacharya became most popular.

Shankaracharya used to say that except God, whatever we see in this world is untrue and only an illusory game. God can be comprehended and attained only through knowledge.

Madhavacharya did not agree with Shankaracharya's view. He was very sad to see that the disciples of Shankaracharya are trying to mislead the people and deflect them from the right path. Within his heart he decided, "I will tour the entire country and tell the people about my view of religion and God".

With this objective in mind, Madhavacharya set out for a tour of the country. First of all, he went to states of South India. He was accompanied by Achyutpreksha and a few other disciples.

During that time, South India was divided into several small States. These States used to frequently fight among themselves. But their Kings used to respect scholars a great deal. If a scholar of a community defeated the scholar of another community in an open debate on the religious scriptures, the king and the subjects would accept the view and the community of the winner.

Madhavacharya first reached Mangalore. Here, he defeated his opponents in a debate on the scriptures with ease. From Mangalore, he advanced to Tiruvaankur. The King of Tiruvaankur gave him a great deal of respect and invited him to his court for a debate on the scriptures. Madhavacharya had set out only to debate the scriptures, hence he accepted the King's invitation. At this very time, the head of Sringeri 'Mutt', Vidyashankar, also reached Thiruvaankur. The 'mutt' at Shringeri was one of the four 'mutts' established by Shankaracharya himself. Madhavacharya won the debate in the presence of King of Tiruvaankur. After this, Madhavacharya reached Rameshwaram, along with his disciples. In Rameshwaram too, after defeating his rivals, Madhavacharya, went to Srirangam and from Srirangam, returned to Udipi.

The result of Madhavacharya's tour was that his victories began to exercise sway over South India. However, the defeat rankled Shankaracharya's disciples. They turned into enemies of Madhavacharya and began harassing Madhavacharya and his disciples everywhere. But this did not deter Madhavacharya.

On his return to Udipi, Madhavacharya wrote a commentary on Bhagvadgita and took up the task of interpretation of the *Vedantasutras*. After staying in Udipi for several years, Madhavacharya decided to make a trip to North India.

During that time, North India was dominated by Muslims. Several times, Madhavacharya had to pass through the estates and territories of Muslim chieftains. Fortunately, Madhavacharya knew both Urdu and Persian very well and could speak both the languages fluently. He would impress Muslim chieftains by talking to them in Urdu or Persian. Hence, no harm was inflicted on him at the hands of Muslims. Madhavacharya used to say that if one wants to carve out a place in the hearts of other people, one should talk in that person's language.

Passing through several towns in North India, in the end, Madhavacharya reached Haridwar. There, he fasted and meditated for several days. In the meantime, he went into a cave in Himalayas for a few days. After spending several days in solitude, he returned to Haridwar. On his return, for the first time, Madhavacharya

openly declared that the worship of Lord Vishnu was the true worship of God. It was here that he later published his interpretation of *Vedantasutra*. Even today, his commentary is considered to be one of its own kind.

He started his trip from Haridwar. Wherever he went, he proved the supremacy of Lord Vishnu, requesting people to join the Vaishnava community and telling them to worship only Lord Vishnu. While returning from North India, he stayed for a few days at Kalyan (Hyderabad). In those days, Kalyan was the capital of Chalukyan kingdom and great scholars resided there.

At Kalyan, Madhavacharya had a debate on scriptures with an extremely renowned scholar—Shobhan Bhatt. Shobhan Bhatt lost the debate. This debate on scriptures had a tremendous impact. Along with Shobhan Bhatt, thousands of people sought initiation in to Vaishnavism. Before leaving Kalyan, Madhavacharya appointed Shobhan Bhatt as the head of his mutt there.

Shringeri mutt was situated near Udipi. The increasing influence of Madhavacharya upset the head priest of Shringeri mutt. Several kings of South India were followers of Shankaracharya's school of thought. Thus, the head priest at Sringeri enjoyed the support of kings. Consequently, various types of injustices began to be perpetrated against Madhavacharya and those adhering to his viewpoint.

The head priest of Sringeri Padmateerth knew that given an opportunity, the entire populace would embrace Vaishnavism, within a matter of few days, and he would be rendered meaningless. Hence, he thought of taking revenge on Madhavacharya. He gathered his followers in the mutt and told them to split up into smaller groups and harass Vaishnava saints in every possible way.

Padmateerth made an arrangement to stop Vaishnava preachers and also devised a plan to destroy Madhavacharya's library. Padmateerth thought that if Madhavacharya's library were to be destroyed, it would put up a major hurdle in the propagation of the Vaishnavite view.

A few messengers of Padmateerth stealthily entered

Madhavacharya's hut and decamped with several books. Later, they buried the books, thinking that nobody would be able to find them. Fortunately, the King of Kumbha, Jai Singh Chalukya, had faith in Madhavacharya. When Madhavacharya sought the help of King Jai Singh, he found out who the miscreants were, with the help of his employees. The books stolen from Madhavacharya were thus retrieved for him.

Among the scholars whom Madhavacharya defeated during debates on scriptures and included them in his community, the name of Pandit Trivikram is the most prominent one. Pandit Trivikram was a follower of Shankaracharya school of thought, but he had developed some dissatisfaction with Shankar's religion. Madhavacharya had defeated Pandit Trivikram after an eight-day debate on the religious scriptures and included him in his community. Trivikram's inclusion to Vaishnav religion made people turn Vaishnavites far and wide.

At the time Madhavacharya was going around Jai Singh's kingdom, his parents had passed away. They had seen Madhavacharya's name and fame spreading far and wide and were proud of their son.

Madhavacharya spent the last few years of his life, peacefully, writing books at the confluence of two rivers—Kumardhara and Netravati. Seated here, he used to send his disciples to propagate the religion and to defeat rivals in the debate on scriptures.

Madhavacharya established many mutts. Before his demise, he had passed on the entire responsibility of propagation of religion to his most talented disciple, Padmateerth, and set up a board of eight disciples to look after the Krishna temple at Udipi. He passed away in peaceful meditation around 1286 A.D.

Like Ramanuja, Madhavacharya too was a great master. According to him, Brahma, the living and the non-living, are eternal and infinite. He felt that the living and non-living are different from the Lord, the soul of living beings too are eternal and there is a lot of difference between them. The relation between the soul and the Supreme God, according to Madhavacharya, was like the relationship between the master and his servant. By worshipping

Vishnu, the living being acquires a lot of virtues, which are to be found in God. But, the soul can never be similar to God. A separate sect of Madhavacharya was formed.

His followers apply a religious mark on the forehead made of sandalwood and the middle line is black, at the centre of which a small red dot is drawn. These people mark circles in various parts of body. The number of people following this sect is innumerable in Karnataka.

Madhavacharya authored 37 books—two among them are considered to be the most prominent, a commentary on *Brahmasutras* and a critique on *Upanishads*.

GYANESHWAR

—N.S. Mathur

GYANESHWAR lived in 13th century A.D. His ancestors were inhabitants of Aapegaon, ten miles from Paithan, on the northern banks of Godavari. But due to some reason, later on they settled down at Aalindi village. Brahmins by caste, they were Kulkarni (Patwaris-village official who maintained records) by profession.

Gyaneshwar's paternal great grandfather, Trayambak Pant was a disciple and an ardent devotee of Guru Gorakhnath. Trayamabak Pant's son, Govind Pant, and daughter-in-law, Mirabai, were loyal servants of Shri Gaininath. Mirabai gave birth to a son, who was named Vittal Pant. The same Vittal Pant was the father of Gyaneshwar.

Since his childhood, Vittal Pant was a lover of knowledge and a devotee of God. After his sacred thread ceremony, he set out to travel round the country. On the way, he would stay with renowned scholars and study scriptures from them. When after several years of marriage, he was still left childless, he decided to seek renunciation, but his wife was against the idea. Hence, one day, he set out from the house on the pretext of taking a bath in the river and took initiation saying that he had no one in the world. His wife, Rukmini Bai, soon heard of this, but she could not do anything, except cry.

After a few years, Swami Ramanand along with his disciples set out for South India, with the objective of religious propagation. Incidentally, he arrived at Aalindi village one day and stayed at the temple. When Rukmini Bai came to the temple on one of her regular visits, she met Swami Ramanand, and greeted him. Swamiji blessed her with the words, "May you become the mother of a son". To this Rukmini Bai said, "My husband has received initiation from you and has become your disciple. Hence, how can your blessings now materialise?"

On his return to Benares, Swami Ramanand ordered Vittal Pant to turn a householder once again. Vittal Pant returned home and began to live with Rukmini Bai. After some time, they were blessed with three sons, Nivrittinath, Gyaneshwar and Sopandev and a daughter, Muktabai. Sri Gyaneshwar was born in 1257 A.D. at Aapegaon. Although Vittal Pant had turned back from renunciation to become a householder on his Guru's command, still according to *Shastras*, an ascetic could never become a householder again. As a result, the entire society ostracized him and he came to be called a sinner and a debauch. When Nivrittinath turned seven, Vittal Pant got worried about his sacred thread ceremony, but no one from his community was ready to say anything in his favour.

In the end, he decided to accept the strictest atonement and asked the religious teachers to hand out a decision on him. After a thorough research of the *Shastras*, the religious teachers gave their final verdict, that neither was there any atonement for Vittal Pant in the *Shastras*, nor could his sons be permitted to wear the sacred thread. Thus, there was no solution for him, except to give up his life.

When he heard of this inhuman order, poor Vittal Pant was shattered. Still, he did not waver from his decision. Giving up all worldly attachment he, straightaway went to "Teerth Raj", another name for 'Prayag', and gave up his life by drowning himself in the holy '*Triveni Sangam*', confluence of the holy rivers. When Rukmini Bai heard the news of her husband's demise, she also went to Prayag and drowned herself at the same spot. Thus, due to the unjust directive of the Brahmins, this grievous and wrong was perpetrated.

After the demise of their parents, all the four children were left absolutely orphaned and helpless. At this time, Nivrittinath was about 10 years old. The children started out for their ancestral village, Aapegaon, in the hope that they would receive some assistance from close relatives. On reaching there, the relatives behaved very rudely with them. Giving them their due share in the ancestral property was a farfetched proposition, they were not

even allowed to live in their ancestral house. The orphans were left with no other option, except begging to eke out a living.

During the same time, one day Nivrittinath lost his way and while roaming around, chanced upon a cave. The cave was the abode of Guru Gaininath. Gaininath was extremely happy to meet the son of his disciple—Vittal Nath. He initiated Nivrittinath to Yoga and gave him a sermon on how to worship Lord Krishna. After spending some time with his Guru, Nivrittinath returned home and initiated Gyaneshwar.

Taking along both his brothers and the sister with him, Nivrittinath returned to Aalindi. Gyaneshwar wanted that permission to wear the sacred thread should be sought from the Brahmin society and thereby integrate themselves back in the social fold. Agreeing with his younger brother, Nivrittinath decided to go to Paithan and seek a corrigendum from the scholars.

After taking a bath in river Godavari, they entered the town. The scholars held a meeting for four days at Paithan. They rummaged through the scriptures, but they could not find even a single reference, in which the sons of an ascetic could be purified, or they could be allowed to wear the sacred thread. Helpless in the end, they were forced to permit the children to worship God as before, but that they should forget their intention of wearing the sacred thread.

At the end of the meeting, one scholar asked the children the meaning of their names. The scholars were astonished at the scholarly response of the children. Some scholars were amused to hear such knowledgeable stuff from the mouth of children. In the meantime, a he-buffalo was seen approaching from the other direction. One scholar spoke up, "Come on, what is there in a name. Give any name to anything. I say that the name of this he-buffalo is Gyaneshwar."

On hearing this, Gyaneshwar replied, "Really, there is no difference between me and this he-buffalo. The same soul, which is in me, is there in it also."

The scholar stepped forward and hit the he-buffalo thrice with a stick. It is said that as soon as the he-buffalo was hit with the stick, three marks of these sticks appeared on Gyaneshwar's body. The scholars were bewildered on seeing this miracle.

Some people began to look upto Gyaneshwar with respect, some others wanted to make fun of him and still others wanted to put him through a more rigorous examination. One scholar stepped forward and said, "If you want to take the corrigendum from us, make this he-buffalo recite the *Vedas*."

It is said that Gyaneshwar immediately put his hand on the head of the he-buffalo. At precisely that moment, the he-buffalo began reciting the Vedic *mantras*. When the scholars saw this miracle, it opened their eyes. It is evident that these are only myths associated with the lives of great men.

After this, Gyaneshwar stayed at Paithan for a few days, along with his brothers and sister. They used to take a bath in river Godavari every day, recited religious scriptures to the people and used to sing devotional songs during the night. Soon, their name and fame spread far and wide.

Incidentally, a respected Brahmin was performing the annual rites (*Shraddha*) of his father. Gyaneshwar was present at the at that time. It is said that as soon as the Brahmin chanted the *mantras* to invoke his ancestors, all his ancestors physically appeared before him in flesh and blood and sat down on the seats earmarked for them. People thought that in all likelihood, this was a miracle performed by Gyaneshwar. The fear of Gyaneshwar's supernatural powers pervaded their hearts. After discussing the issue amongst themselves, the scholars gave Gyaneshwar and his brother, permission to be back in the fold of society of Brahmanas.

After living for a few more days at Paithan, Gyaneshwar walked all the way and arrived at village Neva, along with his brothers and sister. As soon as they entered the village, they saw a woman wailing over the corpse of her husband. On inquiry, they came to know that the dead person's name was Sachidananda.

It is said that as soon as Gyaneshwar said, "*Satt* (truth), *Chitt* (conscience) and *Anand* (bliss) are eternal," and caressed the corpse, it immediately sprung back to life. He bowed his head at Gyaneshwar's feet and became his disciple. The same Sachidananda, after some time, composed a wonderful poetic work—*Gyaneshwar Vijay* (the victory of Gyaneshwar).

From here, Gyaneshwar again reached Aalindi. The news of his miracles had preceded him. The scholars there welcomed Gyaneshwar with open arms. A scholar named Visova Chatti was jealous at seeing this. He called him the son of a monk.

On the occasion of Diwali, once Nivrittinath told Muktabai to prepare a special delicacy, for which earthen utensils were required. Muktabai asked the village potter to make the utensils. Visova Chatti somehow came to know of this and he prevented the potter from making the utensils.

Since Muktabai could not get the utensils, she started crying on reaching home. When Gyaneshwar came to know the reason of Muktabai's crying, then, it is said that, through concentration and meditation, Gyaneshwar got the delicacies cooked on his back. Visova Chatti fell at Gyaneshwar's feet and became his disciple since that day.

Gyaneshwar became a perfect ascetic at the age of 15 and became a supreme devotee of Lord Krishna. He had immense faith in his brother—Nivrittinath. He also considered Nivrittinath as his master. It was at his instance, that at such a young age, Gyaneshwar started writing a commentary on *Shrimadbhagvatgita*. He finished writing this book in a year. It is called *Gyaneshwari*. It is considered to be an unparalleled work in Marathi language. Its language is sweet and so simple that even less educated people can derive pleasure in the profound knowledge of Gita. Gyaneshwar wrote several other books and poems besides *Gyaneshwari*, with *Amritanubhav*, *Changdev-Prashasti*, *Hari Paath*, *Yogvasishth Teeka* (a commentary on Yoga) and *Swaatmapatr*, deserving special mention. After completing *Gyaneshwari*, Gyaneshwar and his associates left Aalindi to undertake a pilgrimage. Nivrittinath and several other saints accompanied him.

Travelling around, they reached Kumhaadh. Ramrai was the King of Kumhaadh. His queen, Sitabai, was a great devotee of saints, but Ramrai was a staunch opponent of saints. The king had ordered that no saints, or ascetics should enter the capital. The king experienced a change of heart under Gyaneshwar's influence and started worshipping him.

Travelling onwards, Gyaneshwar reached Satpura. A Bhil (tribal) named Harpal lived there. He used to rob wayfarers, but he would let go those travellers who sang devotional songs. He served Gyaneshwar with lot of love and armed with bows and arrows, saw them off till a village called Dhaar. From Dhaar, Gyaneshwar and his group reached Ujjayini, where Gyaneshwar gave deliverance to the famous astrologer, Veermangal. He installed a 'Shivling' on his (Veermangal's) tomb. The place is located outside the town, near Sandeepan's 'ashrama' (hermitage) and is still popularly known as Mangaleshwar.

After this, Gyaneshwar went to Prayag. After taking a bath at 'Triveni', the holy confluence and having a 'darshan' (glimpse) of the hermitage of Bhardwaj, he reached Kashi. A saint, Mridagalacharya, was performing a grand sacrifice on the banks of river Manikarnika in Kashi. Several great scholars had congregated there. Gyaneshwar too reached there. A question was raised, 'who should be worshipped first'. Mridagalacharya brought a small-elephant and put a garland around her trunk and it was decided that whosoever the she-elephant garlanded, would be the first one to be worshipped. The she-elephant garlanded Gyaneshwar. He was the first one to be worshipped.

When Gyaneshwar reached Delhi, Sultan Jalaluddin Khilji had ascended the throne of Delhi. When Gyaneshwar and the group of saints tried to awaken its people through devotional songs, the 'Maulvis' complained to the Sultan. Jalaluddin got very angry and he personally arrived at the place where the devotional songs were being sung. But coming under Gyaneshwar's influence, Jalaluddin granted them full freedom to move around in the city and sing devotional songs and returned.

Gyaneshwar and his associates visited Gaya, Ayodhya, Vrindavan, Dwarka, Girnar and other places of pilgrimage, on their way to Marwar and from there, finally arrived at Pandharpur. The journey (Mewar) ended here and one of the most prominent associates of Gyaneshwar, Shree Namdev, hosted a gala luncheon on the occasion, in which several saints were present.

An important incident in Gyaneshwar's life is the redemption of Changdev. Changdev, or Changvateshwar, was a devotee of Shiva and a saint with supernatural powers. It is said that he was an eminent scholar in various fields, he could enter the bodies of other people, he could walk on water and above the Earth's surface. He used to perform many tasks while being seated. His hermitage was situated at the banks of river Tapti. It is also well known that he had turned back death 14 times. But he was extremely proud and snobbish and did not consider anyone else to be of any consequence in his comparison.

When he heard of the miracles being performed by Gyaneshwar, he felt very jealous. He decided to humiliate Gyaneshwar. He first sent a disciple to Gyaneshwar with a blank sheet of paper. As soon as the disciple reached, Gyaneshwar asked him, "has Changdev sent only a blank piece of paper for me?"

Everyone was astonished. In response to the blank sheet of paper, Gyaneshwar wrote back a letter comprising a poetic composition of 65 chhands (metres), which was full of divine knowledge. However, Changdev was not able to comprehend it properly.

Now Changdev became curious to meet Gyaneshwar. He started out along with his 1,400 disciples to meet Gyaneshwar. It is said that Changdev was riding a lion and a serpent was coiled around his hand, which he was using as a whip. When Gyaneshwar heard the news of Changdev's arrival in Aalindi, he was at that moment, sitting on a wall of his house and talking to Nivrittinath. Nivrittinath told Gyaneshwar that they must go and receive a great person like Changdev. But from where would a vehicle be arranged? It is said that on Gyaneshwar's instructions, the same wall, on which Gyaneshwar and his brother were sitting, started moving. When

Changdev saw Gyaneshwar coming towards him, seated on a wall, he was flabbergasted. His inflated ego dissipated and he fell at Gyaneshwar's feet.

Since the ancient times, a big fair used to be held in Pandharpur, on the eleventh day of 'Krishnpaksh' (dark fortnight) in the months of 'Ashaad' (approximately June in solar calendar) and 'Kartik' (approx. October according to the solar calendar). Once Gyaneshwar went to the fair along with his brother and sister. According to the Bhagwat sect, he took a bath in river Chandrabhaga, had a 'darshan' of Lord Pundarik (Vishnu) and went to have a 'darshan' of Vittal-Rukmini to the temple. It is said that he sang a prayer for the Lord in front of all the saints and within his heart, sought the Lord's permission to go into eternal trance and give up his life. His heart had become absolutely weary of this world.

At the young age of 21, Gyaneshwar went into an eternal trance at Aalindi and passed away in 1296 A.D. Namdev has given a heart-rending description of this incident in 250 verses. A large fair is still held every year in his sacred memory at Aalindi even today.

KHUSRAU

—Srinath Singh

ABOUT 600 years ago, there was a famous poet in India, by the name of Amir *Khusrau*. He has written several songs, riddles, puns, humbugs etc. in the spoken language, because of which even after 600 years, the popularity of Amir *Khusrau* has not waned and he is still alive among us in the form of his compositions. Amir *Khusrau* wrote in Hindi too. The type of Hindi he used is quite akin to Hindi being used these days. Hence, he can be called the first poet in modern Hindi.

Khusrau was born in 1255 A.D at a village Patiali in Etah district. His father had come from the region of Balkh-Hazara in search of livelihood and settled down there. *Khusrau* was the youngest of three brothers. He was not even nine years old, when his father passed away at the age of 85 years. After his father's death, his maternal grandfather—Nawab Imad-ul-Mulk brought him up.

When *Khusrau* was 12 years old, a hunt was launched for a livelihood for him. Till that time, members from *Khusrau's* family only knew of sword fighting and joining the army as a profession and used to go to far-off places to fight. However, rather than joining the army and wielding a sword, *Khusrau* considered wielding pen a much better option. From the beginning, *Khusrau's* heart was into composing poetry. He concentrated entirely on reading and writing.

In a preface to one of his books, he writes, "I started writing poetry from the time I was 12. But I could not find a master. I would read poems written by established and upcoming poets and based on them, would attempt to write on my own. Thus, in this way, my writing style became irrepressible and unrestrained."

In those days, poets would go to royal courts and attempt to earn money by reciting poems for the kings. Khusrau too started this work. Compared to other poets, Khusrau achieved fame in royal courts very soon. He also earned a lot more fame and money, for he could compose poems in languages such as Arabic, Persian and Turkish. The Muslim Sultans of Delhi could understand Turkish and Arabic languages with ease.

In the beginning, when he did not have access to royal courts, Khusrau had to face some difficulty. He kept wandering about in the service of smaller Nawabs and chiefs. He had greatly pleased Prince Mohammed, the eldest son of Sultan of Delhi, Ghiyas-ud-din Balban, through his compositions. Mohammed took such a liking for him that he would not allow him to move away from his presence—to the extent that in 1284 A.D, when Mughals attacked Punjab, and Mohammad had to go to wage the war, he took Khusrau along with him. The Prince was killed in the war and the Mughals captured Khusrau and took him along to Balkh. Khusrau's ancestors used to live in Balkh. He returned from Balkh after two years. On reaching India, he recited to Balban, the poem describing the death of his (Balban's) son. His poem was so full of pathos that Balban became sad and restless on hearing it and his health deteriorated all of a sudden. Three days later he died.

Now Khusrau needed a new patron. For two years, he lived with the Governor of Awadh. After that, he returned to Delhi and was appointed to the post of courtier of King Kaiquabad.

In 1290 A.D, when Jalal-ud-din Khilji ascended the throne of Delhi, Khusrau presented himself in his service. He had already heard the name of Khusrau. His compositions pleased Sultan Jalal-ud-din a lot and he gave Khusrau the title of 'Amir'. He employed him in his court and started paying him a handsome monthly salary.

In 1296, Sultan Jalal-ud-din's nephew—Ala-ud-din Khilji ascended the throne of Delhi after killing his uncle. Ala-ud-din too was pleased with Amir Khusrau. He made all the arrangements to ensure that Khusrau continued to get all facilities as before. Ala-ud-din gave Khusrau the title of 'Khusrav-e-Shoara' meaning 'Kavi Samrat' (poet laureate, or king among poets) and continued to give

him the monthly salary he used to get from Jalal-ud-din. In 1316 A.D, Qutub-ud-din Mubarak Shah became the Sultan. Qutub-ud-din too was fond of poetry. He was so happy with Khusrau's poetry that he gave Khusrau gold equivalent to the weight of an elephant.

After the downfall of the Khilji dynasty, when Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq ascended the throne, Khusrau wrote a book named after him—"Tughlaqnamah". This is believed to be the last book written by Khusrau.

Khusrau wrote a total of 99 books. All the books were invariably written in Persian, or Arabic. Translations of some of them are found in Hindi and Urdu. The titles of some of the books are—*Masnavi Shiri Farhad*, *Masnavi Laila Majnu* and *Khaliq Bari*.

Khusrau is considered to be the greatest Persian poet of his times. But even Hindi was as simple for him, as Persian. Some of the chhand (metres) composed by him were such that one line was composed in Persian and the other one in Hindi. For instance,

*Shabaane Hizraan, Daraz Choon Zulfo Roze Vaslat
Chu Umr Kotahn*

(The nights of separation are long like the hair, the days of union are short for a lifetime).

*Sakhi Piya Ko Jo Mein Na Dekhoon To kaise
kaatoon andheri ratiyaan.*

(Oh my friend, if I don't see my beloved, how will the dark night pass.)

This makes it clear that in those days, there was no dearth of such people, who could understand both the languages—Hindi and Persian equally well.

Khusrau had seen with his own eyes the end of Slave dynasty, rise and fall of Khilji dynasty and the origin of Tughlaq dynasty. During his lifetime, eight Sultans ascended the throne of Delhi, of whom, he had the good fortune of occupying a respectable position, in the courts of five of them.

It is worth keeping in mind that the reason why Khusrau

commands respect even today, is the fact that he wrote books in Persian language too. Five of his 'diwans' (compendium of poetry) and five 'masnavis' (epic poems) are in Persian. Of all the Persian poets in India, he is considered to be the greatest. He will always be remembered for the miscellaneous metres composed in Hindi. Khusrau even then used to write poetry in day-to-day conversational language. He had created a concise treasure, abounding in verse, which would blend the two languages.

Sample a few riddles composed by him 600 years ago. It seems as if they had been penned today.

"When it stands, it is *lota*. (lied down) When it lies down, it is *lota*.

It sits and is still known as a *lota*. (Answer-Lota-a round metal utensil)

"Has severed 20 heads.

But it can neither be hit, nor injured". (Answer-Nails (na-khoon))

"When it comes before you, give it a hand.

It can neither be hit, nor injured". (Answer-Mirror (Aaina))

'Kahmukri' were said to be lines in which the answer to the riddle lay in the last verse. For instance, 'the one who always adds to the charm, one who is never away from the eyes, there comes my beloved Oh my friend, it is my beloved and not collyrium'.

'Dosukhne' (puns) were those compositions in which two questions had the same answer, like—

'Why was the scholar thirsty?

Why was the donkey sad'. (Answer-'Lota na tha'), meaning there was no utensil for the scholar to drink from and the donkey had not rolled around (*lota*).

'Why was the 'Sitar' (a musical instrument) not played?

Why did the female not take a bath? (Answer-'Parda na tha'), implying that the musical instrument did not have a surface and the female did not take a bath because there were no curtains'.

Now, sample a humbug. Once Khusrau was going somewhere. On the way, he felt thirsty. He stopped by a well to drink water. At that time, four ladies were drawing water from the well. One of them asked Khusrau to recite a poem on 'kheer' (sweet pudding of rice and milk) and only then she would give him water. The second one wanted to hear a poem on 'charkha' (spinning wheel), the third one wanted a poem on a dog and the fourth one wanted to hear a poem on a 'dhol' (small drum). Khusrau dealt with all of them satisfactorily in one verse. He said—

"The 'kheer' was prepared with great pains, the spinning wheel was turned, the dog ate the pudding, now you sit and play the drum. Come on now, give me water".

Khusrau was an excellent musician too. He invented several 'ragas' (musical compositions with a fixed sequence of notes) and 'Raginis' (musical variations thereof).

Amir Khusrau gained expertise in Indian (Hindustani) music. He had a similar expertise over Iranian music too and blending both, he brought out a third element, which breathed a new life into music as an art form and a new kind of pleasure was derived from it. Mixing some Iranian 'ragas' with the Indian 'ragas', he created some new 'ragas', the details of which are produced below:

'Aiman'—by blending Indian *raga*, Hindol with Iranian *raga*, Neereej;

'Ushaak'—by merging Indian *raga*, Sarang and Basant, with Iranian *raga*, Nava;

'Muwwafiq'-by mixing Indian *raga*, Todi and Malri with Iranian *raga*, Doorga Hussaini;

'Jailf'—mixture of Indian *raga*, Khatarag and Iranian *raga*, Shehnaz;

'Fargana'—blend of Indian *raga*, Kangli and Gaura and Iranian *raga*, Fargaana;

'Saraa Parda' (Sarparda)—by mixing Indian *raga*, Saarang, Bilawal and Iranian *raga*, Raast;

'Bakharaz'—a new blend of Indian *raga*, Deskaar and an Iranian *raga*, Firodost, or Pehar Dost (Fardost)—a mixture of Indian *ragas*, Kanhada Gauri Poorvi and a Persian *raga*.

The alternations and additions that Amir Khusrau made to the older styles and the new pathways that he created by breaking old traditions, should not be taken to mean that these changes were generally appreciated. The admirers of old *ragas* did not own up the new *ragas*. This appears to be the reason as to why out of the many *ragas*, which have been discussed above and which had been created by Khusrau by blending Indian and Iranian *ragas*, only a few survive till today. The people are not well versed with the names of others too.

It is believed that sitar (a stringed musical instrument) was invented by Amir Khusrau. However, several people are of the view that sitar was not an altogether new invention by Amir Khusrau. It is said that in the 10th century, or a little earlier, in Asia Minor, Iran, Armenia and Turkmenistan, an instrument resembling sitar, which was known as 'Zeethar', or 'Guitar' was known, but it resembled an old Egyptian instrument—'Sthaara'.

All the instruments used in the West, which resembled a sitar, had four strings. It is possible that Khusrau might have added three more strings and the instrument popularly came to be called sitar. While playing the sitar, special sounds are produced—"Da, Ra, Dir". When the strings are pulled inwards, the sound of 'Ra' is produced. However, between pulling the strings inwards and outwards, another sound—"Dir" is produced. Thus, the sounds—"Da, Dir" and "Da-ra" are produced.

In brief, the reason behind Khusrau's greatness is that at the time when the cultures of Indian and Islamic countries were coming into contact, Amir Khusrau did great work. He took this coming together of both the civilisations a great deal forward in the realms of music and literature. This is a great contribution of Khusrau to Indian culture.

Khusrau was a religious man. Whatever he composed in the honour of his mentor, Nizamuddin Auliya, had a great deal of impact. Hence, "Qawwali" (devotional songs), which have a religious hue to them, became very popular and continue to be popular even today. Some of his songs too gained popularity. Women in the region around Delhi still sing the songs composed by him.

As has been mentioned above, Khusrau revered his religious teacher, Nizamuddin Auliya Auliya who passed away in 1324 A.D. At that time Khusrau was out of Delhi. On receiving this news, he immediately returned to Delhi. He went near Auliya's grave and read out this couplet—

Gori sove sej par, mukh par dare kes,

(The belle is sleeping on the bed, with the hair covering her face,)

Chal Khusrau ghar aapne raen bhai chahun des.

(Come Khusrau, leave for your abode, as darkness has descended everywhere.)

After this, Khusrau left his home and settled down near the tomb of his religious teacher and gave away all his money. He too died in the same year. He was buried near the grave of his teacher. Even today, a fair is held near his grave.

VIDYARANYA

—Dashrath Sharma

VIDYARANYA is a great personality of the 14th century. He achieved popularity in both—religious and political spheres. It is important to cast a glance at the political and religious situation of those times to understand his importance.

In the year 712 A.D, the Arabs won over the Sindh province, but could not proceed further because of the bravery of several Rajput tribes. Around the year 1000 A.D, a second wave of attack came and this time Punjab went out of our hands. But still, the Indians did not wake up from their slumber. Their internecine conflicts continued. The Chalukyas of Gujarat attacked the Chauhans of Ajmer. On the other hand, the King of the Chauhans of Ajmer, Prithviraj had by his deeds, bought the enmity of Chandelas of Mahoba and Gahadavals of Kannauj. The result of this was that, in the year 1192 A.D, when some more waves of foreign invasions came, the Indian kings could not face them and within a few years, Muslims had spread out from the Western to the Eastern end.

The states of South India could have learnt a few lessons from this pitiable condition of North India, but considering themselves to be safe due to the presence of mountains and dense forests of Vindhyas and Satpuras, they too kept fighting amongst themselves, just like the kings of North India. Ultimately, the result too was the same. About 100 years after the political decline of North India, it was as if history had repeated itself.

In 1294 A.D, when Jalaluddin Khilji was ruling Delhi, his nephew—Alauddin suddenly attacked Yadav State of Devagiri. Ramchandra Yadav could not face this unprecedented trouble and got away after paying huge amount of indemnity. However, in 1307 A.D, Alauddin despatched his armies towards South India after winning several territories in North India, within a span of 12 years.

This time the King of Devagiri accepted the subordination of Delhi. King Prataprudra II of Warangal too had to pay tax. King Veer Ballal-III of Dwarsamudra too lost to Muslims. On the other hand, Sundar Pandya and Veer Pandya were fighting each other for the control of the Pandya kingdom. Hence, the General of Alauddin, Malik Kafur, taking advantage of the situation, under the pretext of providing assistance to Sundar Pandya, reached the southern end of India via Madura.

Alauddin's successor, Mubarak integrated Devagiri into the Muslim empire. Then, in 1323 A.D, Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq conquered Warangal. Five years later, in the year 1328, Muslims brought Madura too under their control. In 1334 A.D, a Muslim Sultanate was established there.

In this way, by 1330 A.D the Muslims had spread out throughout India. The Indians had lost their States. Their culture too had undergone transformation. Mosques were replacing temples. It was getting increasingly difficult to follow the 'Varnashram Dharma' (divisions of life into different stages). The elements which had till now been treated by the Indian people as the main component of religion, had been attacked most severely by Muslim invasions.

In such a terrible condition, South India needed someone, who could bring about a political and religious salvation of India. But a lop-sided salvation was not enough, for there is a deep-rooted relation between the two. A community, which does not have any love for its culture, is feeble in its political vision, would be attacked on its culture and treated as inferior inevitably. Vidyaranya understood both these aspects of this serious problem confronting South India and became active accordingly.

Vidyaranya was known as Madhav at home. Sayan and Bhognath were his younger brothers. His father's name was Mayan and his mother was known as Srimati. His father was probably the family priest of Harihar and Bukka, the co-founders of the Vijaynagar kingdom. Though, Madhav would have specially mentioned his father, but he has specially mentioned Vidyateerth, Bhartiteerth and Shrikanth as his mentors. Vidyateerth was the Shankaracharya of Sringeri 'mutt' (monastery). Bhartiteerth too was a preceptor

on Vedant. Srikanth was the teacher of Vidyaranya and Bhognath. It is very likely that Madhav might have got education in poetry and literature from Srikanth.

Madhav, the child, had seen his country being badly trampled upon. Till that time, people had fled from Chidambaram—the holy place of pilgrimage. Grass had grown in the sanctum sanctorum of temples and in pillared halls (mandapams). Instead of the aroma of incense used in sacrifices the stench of cooked meat had started emanating. The water of river Tamraparni, instead of blending with sandalwood, was being mixed with the blood. Taxes had been imposed on temple trusts and temples. Several temples had either broken down on their own, or had been razed to the ground. Hindu States had been finished off by the Muslims by force and deceit.

Madhav was born in one such Hindu State. He could not bear the plight South India was in. He decided to redeem it according to his capacity. He also made his brothers and disciples uphold the same pledge.

It is evident from the traditions that in the year 1336, under Madhavacharya's (Vidyaranya) tutelage, the sons of Sangamraj—Harihar, Bukka, and others established the kingdom of Vijaynagar. Till that time, the nation had become restless because of Muslim tyranny. People were clamouring for deliverance. It was the duty of Madhavacharya to rid the people of their troubles. His younger brother, Sayan, was a scholar and a good general. On the other hand, Bhognath was a good poet. It is doubtful whether Madhavacharya himself ever led an army, or not, but Kautilya uprooted the Nanda empire, without picking up the sword himself and established a new empire. It is possible that Madhavacharya's task was of the same type and equally important. On his orders, the sons of Sangamraj rejuvenated the Indian culture in the South. They defeated the generals of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq at several places and in the end, established a vast empire in Vijaynagar. Seeing this, a new wave of enthusiasm swept the Hindus. When news of the establishment of this empire reached Gingee, its king attacked Muslims, defeated them and re-established the prestige

of Srirangnath. Bukka Rai's brave son-Kampan got the ancient temples reconstructed and started the practice of worshipping again. Besides, giving good education to Sangam-II, Sayan led the army in several wars.

Along with taking this great political task to completion, Madhavacharya took up in his hands the task of placing the tenets of Hindu religion before the people. In his work—*Parasharmadhaviya*, he has propounded the Hindu religious scriptures (*Dharma Shastras*) and practical science very well. The work is revered among the Hindus in the same way as *Manusmriti*. He probably composed this work around the year 1354. His other famous works are—*Jeevanmukti-Vivekpanchdashi* and *Jaiminiya Nyaymala*. It is said that he even assisted in writing a commentary on *Vedas*.

Vidyaranya was confident that there was no other thing other than Brahma over Sachidananda and the soul is an integral part of it. A person who works according to these principles, is liberated from the worldly bonds of life. To remain steadfast in judgment (concept of Bhagvadgita) can be classified under the category of one free from the worldly bonds of life.

In about 1337 A.D, Madhavacharya became a monk and took the name—Vidyaranya. However, his affection towards the protection of Hindu religion remained the same. It is said that Vidyaranya even tried to rope in the great teacher of Vaishnava religion, Vedantshikshak in this task. In 1386 A.D, King Harihar III of Vijaynagar honoured some scholars who had written a commentary on the four Vedas, in the presence of Vidyaranya. Several things prove the amount of respect that Vidyaranya had in the hearts of people. In 1380 A.D, a nephew of Harihar II donated an 'Agrahar' to a disciple of Vidyaranya, Vidyabhushan Dixit and named it after Vidyaranya. Harihar also got a temple constructed at Hampi in the name of Vidyaranya.

Vidyaranya was really a leader of his times. He had an exceptional ability for leadership. A true leader is one, who works himself and builds in so much of enthusiasm in others that they start moving

in the direction of achieving their goal. In this respect, Vidyaranya was unparalleled. It was the result of his attempts that Indian culture survived in South India, a new vigour pervaded Sanskrit literature and philosophy and Indian kings could use such words like *Vedamarg-Pratishthaapanacharya* and *Vedic-Margpratishthapracharya* (teachers of the establishment of the path of Vedas) for themselves. After Shankaracharya, very few scholars have explained the principles of Vedanta in a commentary in such a simple and glorious style.

SHANKARDEVA

—Yugjeet Nawalpuri

SHANKARDEVA was born on Dussehra day at Alipukkuri village in 1448 A.D. Shankardev's mother, Satyasandha Devi, and father, Kusumbar Bhuiyan, had passed away during his childhood. Kusumbar was a 'Shiromani Bhuiyan' (big landholder). After his demise, the business passed on to Shankar's elder brother, Jayant. Shankar's grandmother, Khersuti brought him up.

Shankar's childhood was spent in fun and frolic. Shankara would roam around from one jungle to another alongwith his group of playmates. They would hunt with bows and arrows, catch hold of birds, would swim back and forth from one side of river Brahmaputra to the other side. He was very naughty and very brave too. It is said that he once sat on the back of a bear. The bear got up and ran away with Shankar riding on its back. Somehow, he was saved.

His heart was not into studies. While playing, he would even forget to eat and drink. Even when called, he would not come home. People would look for him and he would keep running away from them. When caught, he would get a sound beating. Still, he would not stop playing pranks and would not listen to anyone. One day when his grandmother was serving him food, she started crying and asked him, "Tell me the truth, son! Why don't you study"?

Shankar was moved. He said, "All right, now I will study all the scriptures".

His grandfather admitted him to a nursery school. His teacher's name was Mahendra Kandli. This time, Shankar got down to studying. He forgot all about playing games. For five years, he just studied. After five years, he returned home as a master of grammar, poetry and *Dharmashastras*.

While in the school, Shankar would also practise yoga. But gradually, he began to derive so much pleasure from *Bhagvata*

that he abandoned the path of yoga. Now, he would have a *Bhagvata* a with him all the time. He would read it, ponder about it and explain it to other people. Seeing him so immersed in the devotion of *Bhagvata*, the elders would taunt him—"Son Shankar, we can hardly do anything now, create a heaven for us."

Shankar really got down to constructing a heaven. He had some practice of painting. He purchased large-sized curtains and started to draw paintings on it. With diverse colours, he painted seven heavens on seven curtains. In all the seven, he portrayed seven Gods. He drew lakes and beautiful gardens here and there. When the paintings were ready, the people were astonished to see them. The news spread around that Shankar has drawn paintings of heaven. People from all over the kingdom thronged to see the heaven. Children, old people, men, women, irrespective of their age, flocked in an unending stream. At times, it would become so crowded that there was not an iota of space in the village.

In the end, he devised a solution. In the local dialect of the village, he wrote a play—*Chinh Yaatra* (Sign Journey). He thoroughly trained some rope dancers. He made Ramram Guru the narrator of the play. The same canvases were decorated and they started acting. When there was a shortage of musicians, he would jump on to the stage. The play proved to be an instant hit. Even the relatives of the dancers could not recognize them. All the characters gave them the impression that Shankar was present in every character. *Chinh Yaatra* was Shankar's second work. He had already written an epic poem during his student days.

A few messages by him also found their way into the book. The reason was his love for *Bhagavata*. He had not only read *Bhagavata*, but had also reflected over it. Through this, he came to the conclusion that the confusion over religion was uncalled for. A religion should be simple, uncomplicated and intelligible. He chose the path of 'bhakti' (devotion) to attain the almighty. This path alone could have brought about a unity amongst people.

This religion of Shankar gave people the confidence and filled their hearts with the feeling that everyone in the world is equal. Everybody has an importance of his own. This resulted in decline

in mutual discrimination. The individual got support to live in the society holding his head high.

When Shankar was 21 years old, he began writing devotional hymns (*kirtans*). These contained tales from *Bhagavata*.

Simple words, songs and tales explaining the importance of devotion, unity, equality and affection were the special features of these devotional songs. People sing these songs in 'Namghars' (places where these songs are sung) all over Assam even today.

When his family members saw that he was busy in religious work day in and day out, they married off Shankardev to Suryavati Devi. They also thrust on his shoulders the responsibility of lording over the estates. Shankar took charge of both the responsibilities. Still, he spent most of his time in singing about the qualities of Krishna, the God without attributes, and in spreading the religion.

Casteism had exercised its spell over everyone in those days. The conditions were very bad. Brahmins and Bhuiyan Kayasthas were considered 'higher castes' and rest of the people, as 'lower castes'. Even amongst these castes, there was discrimination between 'high' and 'low'. Boatman was the lowest caste. Shankar did not like this discrimination, so he strongly attacked casteism.

There was a canal near Bardova. In the four months during the rainy season, when this canal used to be flooded, the water would sweep away the crops in the field. The people pleaded with him—"The outstanding one among Bhuiyans, please get a dam constructed."

Shankar gathered people from all the nearby villages and got down to constructing the dam. But the dam would breach. In the end, Shankar said, "if the first lump of soil is thrown by a 'sati' (a chaste and faithful woman), the dam would withstand."

The search for 'sati' (chaste and loyal woman) started. The women of Brahmin and Bhuiyan castes began looking the other way. In the end, a girl, Radhika, from 'Kevat' (boatman) caste, came forward and the dam stood. The pride of the 'higher' castes was shattered. Even to this day, the canal (Nala) is known as 'Sati Nala', or 'Shanti Nala'.

When Shankar was 30 years old, he was blessed with a daughter. He named her Manu. After nine months of Manu's birth, Shankar's

wife passed away. Nine years after this, Shankar set out for a pilgrimage. In those days, a pilgrimage meant travelling around the country on foot. There were forests everywhere. He wandered for 12 years. At every place, people were enchanted by his sermons. During this journey, he made so many disciples. After that, when he returned to Bardova, under pressure from his near and dear ones and the people, he married a second time.

In the meantime, there arose a rift between Bhuiyans and Kachcharis. Even the administration had become slack after Kusumbar. The Kachcharis had mounted an invasion. But Shankar did not deem it proper to confront them, as lives would have been needlessly lost. He decided to quit Bardova.

This incident took place in 1516 A.D. Shankardev had turned 68. Till now, besides the eight parts of his books titled *Kirtanghosh*, he had written some chapters of *Bhakti Pradeen*, *Rukmini Haran Kaavya*, *Badh-Geet*, *Bhagvat ke Chhathe* (the story of Ajamil), *Aur Athuce Skand* (*Gajagrah*, *Amritamanthan* and *Harmohan*) and *Gunmala*.

The people of Bhuiyan did not get any respite after fleeing from Bardova. Across the river Brahmaputra, where they had taken refuge, the Bhotiyas would attack every now and then. It became very difficult for the Bhuiyans to stay there. Shankar went to Majuli island along with his followers. He lived here for 14 years. He came across several of his leading disciples. Madhavdev was one of them. He had come for a debate on religious scriptures, but forgot all about his ego as soon as he saw Shankar and received initiation from him. He lived with Shankar, like his shadow throughout his life. He propagated Shankar's views.

Shankardev used to sing devotional songs (*kirtans*) with his disciples at 'Patbausi', hence his devotees consider 'Patbausi' to be a second Vrindavan. Here (at Patbausi), a Muslim gentleman called Chandwa (Chand Shah) and a Garo tribal youth leader, Govind became his disciples. Both of them rendered yeoman service in eradicating the caste system and untouchability and uniting the communities in Assam. Wherever Shankardev went, he would inaugurate 'Namghars' (places for singing devotional

songs). Later on, these 'Namghars' became the cultural and administrative hubs of the villages.

From Patbausi, he set out for a second pilgrimage at the age of 97. This time, he visited Ganga, Navdweep, Kabeer mutt, 'Shree Kshetra' and Puri.

When Shankar returned, his devotional songs (*kirtans*) took Assam by storm. His influence, as compared to before had increased manifold. His opponents panicked and spread the rumour that Shankardev wanted to wipe out Hinduism. Koch-Raja ordered the arrest of Shankar. The King's brother, Diwan Chilurai, knew Shankar very well. He called over Shankar secretly. He was presented in the court. The scholars sprang for a debate on scriptures (*Shaastrarth*) with Shankar. But Shankar defeated them. This gained him more respect. There he completed his book titled *Gunmala* and presented it to the King. The King was astonished to witness this feat. He rewarded Shankar by presenting him clothes studded with jewels.

It is said that at the age of 120 years in the year 1568 AD, in the month of Bhadrapad (the sixth month of the Hindu calendar), on the moonlit fortnight of the lunar month (Sudi Dooj), the great Shankardev breathed his last, while singing devotional songs in a congregation.

Shankar brought about a renaissance in the society, literature and culture of the State of Assam. It was due to his influence that new creations were made every day in literature, culture and painting.

Shankar was an ideal householder. His was a large household. He had appointed tutors to teach his children. Farming was looked after by the servants. Guests and people seeking favours would perennially throng his house and the house was always swarming with such people. There were no limits to his magnanimity.

Shankar freed the people from the clutches of priests and shook the foundations of the caste system. Shankar was the forerunner of social awakening in Assam. His name can never be forgotten. Vaishnava saints have written several biographies on him, but Shankar continues to be immortal, even without them.

NARSINGH MEHTA

—Saroj Bhatt

WITH the onset of dawn, every household in Gujarat reverberates with early morning songs and devotional hymns. In particular, the verses composed by saint Narsingh are immensely popular in Gujarat. The saint Narsingh Dev is considered to be the first-ever poet in Gujarati language. Overwhelmed with devotion, the verses composed by Narsingh Dev became extremely popular for their simplicity and sweetness. He was a great singer and the verses composed by him have been composed in different *ragas*. Narsingh has composed the favourite hymn of Bapu.

*Vaishnav jan to tene kahiye je peer paraayii jaane
re / Par-dukkhe upakaar kare to yeh man abhimaan
naa aane re / Vaishnav jan to tene kahiye je...*

*Sakal lok maan sahune vande nindaa na kare keni
re / Vaach kaachh man nishchal raakhe dhan-dhan
janani teni re / Vaishnav jan to tene kahiye je...*

*Sam-drishhti ne trishnaa tyaagii par-stri jene maat
re / Jihvaa thaki asatya naa bole par-dhan nav
jhaale haath re / Vaishnav jan to tene kahiye je...*

*Moh-maayaa vyaape nahi jene dridh vairaagya
jena man maan re / Naam naam sun taali laagi sakal
tirath tenaa tan maan re / Vaishnav jan to tene
kahiye je...*

*Van-lobhi ke kapat-rahit chhe kaam-krodh
nivaaryaa re / Bhane narasaiyyo tenun darshan
kartaa kul ekoter taarayaa re / Vaishnav jan to tene
kahiye je...*

*A godlike man is one who, feels another's pain Who
shares another's sorrow, And pride does disdain.
Who regards himself as the lowliest of the low,*

Speaks not a word of evil against any one One who keeps himself steadfast in words, body and mind, Blessed is the mother who gives birth to such a son. Who looks upon everyone as his equal and has renounced lust, And who honours women like he honours his mother Whose tongue knows not the taste of falsehood till his last breath, Nor covets another's worldly goods. He does not desire worldly things, For he treads the path of renunciation Ever on his lips is Rama's holy name, All places of pilgrimage are within him. One who is not greedy and deceitful, And has conquered lust and anger Through such a man Saint Narsaiyon has a godly vision, Generations to come, of such a man, will attain salvation

(English translation by Khushwant Singh)

Narsingh has adorned the Gujarati language by his sweet verses. He has composed several verses on knowledge and devotion.

Narsingh was born in Talaja village of Saurashtra. His lifetime is believed to be between the years 1414 and 1480 A.D. Narsingh was a 'Nagar' Brahmin by caste. His father's name was Krishnadas and his mother's name was Dayakor. Narsingh was still a child, when his parents passed away. Later on, he was brought up in the house of his uncle (paternal).

Since his childhood, Narsingh used to travel around with groups of saints and would spend most of his time in temples. When he was around 17-18 years old, he was married off to Manikbai. Even after his marriage, he used to stay with his cousin brother. Narsingh did not like to do household chores. Hence, his brother's wife would invariably call him names. It is said that peeved on one occasion, Narsingh went to a temple of Lord Shiva. There, he did penance for seven days. Pleased with this, Shivji appeared and said, "you worship Krishna, sing paeans in his honour".

From that very day, Narsingh bought a separate house of his own in Junagadh and immersed himself in devotion of Krishna.

Even today, there is a raised platform at the place where his house stood—in a street in Nagarwada in Junagadh. It is popularly known as the 'altar of Narsingh Mehta'.

In the old days, people used to consider even touching Harijans (untouchables) to be a sin, but Narsingh would visit the colonies of Harijans and sit with them, sing hymns in the honour of God. He did not believe in untouchability, hence the other Nagar Brahmins would make fun of him. They boycotted him socially, but this did not deter him from his ideals. He used to consider human being as a manifestation of God. He would say, "I invariably sit down at a place where there is devotion and praise of Lord Krishna".

There is no doubt that Narsingh was a renowned social reformer of his times. Though, he had to become the victim of the wrath of the society, he remained steadfast in his resolve.

Narsingh had composed several devotional verses. He had unwavering faith in Krishna. Devotees believe that just as Draupadi's honour was preserved before a full gathering and Mirabai's cup of poison turned into nectar, similar miraculous incidents occurred in the life of saint Narsingh too.

Once upon a time, some devotees had to go on a pilgrimage to Dwarka. They wanted to get a 'Hundi' (bill of exchange) written by a merchant, who had respect in that State too. Some neighbours jokingly told them to go to the place where Narsingh Mehta lived. The 'Hundi' issued by him is valid everywhere. The devotees went to him and requested Narsingh, "charge whatever amount from us, but write a bill of exchange for someone in Dwarka."

Narsingh thought, "These are devotees. Their work must be done". But he did not know anyone in Dwarka. After some thought, he wrote a bill of exchange for Rs. 700 in the name of the head of Dwarka, Shaamal Shah (one of the names of Lord Krishna).

Having got the bill of exchange written, the devotees reached Dwarka. After taking a bath and eating meals, they set out in search of the merchant, Shaamal Shah. After a lot of searching, they came to know that there was no merchant by the name of

Shamal Shah. The devotees panicked and prepared to go back to Junagadh. It is said that Lord Krishna realized the pain of saint Narsingh and met the devotees on the way, as merchant Shaamal Shah and said to them, "I am Shaamal Shah. Here, is the cost of the bill of exchange and tell me if can do anything more for you."

The devotees were glad to get the money for the bill of exchange, but when Narsingh heard of the incident, he became overwhelmed and began to sing praises of God's affection for his devotees. Narsingh had two children—a daughter and a son. His daughter's name was Kunwarbai and his son's name was Shaamaldas. Narsingh married off his daughter and four years later, his daughter was expecting a child. In Gujarat, there is a tradition of sending gifts from the maternal grandfather's house on such occasions. This is known as 'Mameru' in Gujarati language. It is said that the in-laws of his daughter sent an exhaustive list of things in order to make fun of Narsingh's poverty.

Narsingh did not even have a penny to give away, but he had supreme faith in Lord Shaamal that he would surely do the needful. On this occasion, Narsingh took a group of saints and reached the village of his daughter. The daughter met her father and cried a lot and said, "when you didn't have money, why did you come here on this occasion?"

Narsingh tried a lot to make her understand and get her mother-in-law to write all the things that were required.

On hearing this, the mother-in-law prepared a list ten times more exhaustive than what was required. Hundreds of pairs of clothes, sarees of various brands and also jokingly added that if nothing could possibly be arranged, they should bring two huge pieces of boulders. After all, what else could be expected of a poor, beggar father?

It is said that Narsingh immersed himself in singing devotional hymns, to tide over the crisis. Listening to his devotee's prayer, the affectionate Lord reached the house of Narsingh's daughter in the form of the merchant, Shaamal Shah, at the appointed hour. All the things written in the list were delivered and when he was

about to hand over the large boulders asked for, the boulders turned into gold at the mere touch of the Lord.

There is another common legend about Narsingh. Narsingh's son, Shaamal Shah too was married by the grace of the Lord. Narsingh has dwelt about this also at length, in his verses.

When Shaamaldas was 12 years old, his mother thought that the boy is grown up, hence he should be married off. However, the marriage was impossible without money. But Narsingh was sure that Lord Shaamal would surely attend the marriage and that this auspicious task would be accomplished.

Incidentally, at the same time, the daughter of the King's minister in Badhnagar—Madan Mehta, had turned eight years old. According to an ancient custom, a priest was sent in search of a suitable boy. The priest went to Junagadh. He searched many households, but none of the boys appealed to him. He was thinking of returning, when somebody suggested Narsingh's son to him in a lighter vein. The priest was impressed by the devotion and good conduct of Narsingh and performed the 'Tilak' (religious mark on the forehead to symbolize engagement) and gave his promise for the marriage.

On his return to Badhnagar, the priest narrated the sequence of events, in detail, to Madan Mehta. On hearing this, the daughter's parents became sad and said, "being our family priest, what have you done? Narsingh is extremely poor."

The priest convinced everyone and fixed an auspicious date for the marriage and informed Narsingh of the same. Once the date was finalized, Narsingh reached Dwarka for assistance. On his arrival, he fervently prayed to the Almighty and invited the Almighty to be present along with him at the wedding. The Lord stayed with the groom's wedding party and twelve days later when the wedding party reached Badhnagar, the devotee's son was married with great pomp and show.

Just as Meera had to endure a lot of hardships at the hands of her opponents, Narsingh too similarly had to face a lot of problems.

It is said that the stories of these miracles that took place in his life reached the ears of the King of Junagadh. Some insolent courtiers tried to poison the King against Narsingh by saying that he had let go of all manners and morals, and he had a close association with untouchables. Thus, the King should test him to find out if his Lord protects him.

The King ordered that Narsingh be arrested and presented before him and challenged him by saying that if his God was a reality, he should call Him for assistance. "If God does not put a garland around your neck by the morning, consider your life to be in danger."

Narsingh had immense faith in God. In a distressed voice, alongwith clapping he began to sing devotional hymns of the God. The Lord kept the devotee's honour intact and put a garland of flowers around the neck of Narsingh from the skies. It is said that on witnessing this miracle, there was applause from all the four directions.

Like Meera, Narsingh too has made a mention of the miraculous incidents taking place in his life, in his verses. His mellifluous verses are recited in every household of Gujarat and people fondly listen to and narrate the legends of his devotion to God.

KABIR

—Chandrakanta Jerath

KABIR was born around 1398 A.D. Several legends are narrated about his birth. According to one traditional story, a weaver called Neeru lived in Kashi. The name of this weaver's wife was Neema. Neema and Neeru were childless. Both used to pray everyday, visit 'Pirs' (Muslim saints), took vows of offering, but it was as if the pleasure of a child was not in their destiny. One night Neeru saw a strange dream. He felt as if someone was saying to him, "Neeru, you long for a son? Tomorrow at the break of dawn, go to the 'Lehartara' pond. There you will find a child lying on one of the lotus flowers. Bring up the boy like your own son."

When Neeru woke up in the morning, he told Neema about his dream. Both went running to the banks of 'Lehartara' pond. To their surprise, they really saw a small child lying on a lotus flower. They picked up the child and brought him home. This child later became popular by the name of Kabir.

Another story about Kabir's birth is that a Brahmin had come to Kashi, along with his widowed daughter, to take a holy dip in the Ganga. One day on the banks of the Ganga, seeing the famous saint, Swami Ramanand, they greeted him respectfully. Swami Ramanand blessed the girl, "Daughter, may you become the mother of a son."

The Brahmin was surprised to hear the blessings and said, 'But revered one, my daughter is a widow. How could you bless her to be the mother of a son?'

Swami Ramanand said, "Now I have given her my blessings. These blessings cannot be false. But remember, the son of this girl will become a great saint."

Really, after a few days, the daughter of the Brahmin gave birth to a child. Being a widow, out of shame, she hid the child on the

banks of 'Lehartara' pond and left the place with a heavy heart. Fortunately, a weaver called Neeru and his wife, Neema, passed that way soon after. When both saw a child lying at the banks of the pool, they brought him home. Neeru did not have any child, hence, he brought up this child as his own.

Actually all these are just legends associated with Kabir. This much is certain that whoever might have been Kabir's parents, his upbringing took place at the house of the weaver, Neeru. Kabir himself has mentioned that he is a weaver in his verses.

Kabir considered Swami Ramanand to be his Guru (teacher). At that time, Swami Ramanand was a famous Hindu saint. It is said that Kabir sought the initiatory 'mantra' from him. Ever since Kabir was a child, he had immersed himself in God. He thought himself that Swamiji would not grant the initiatory 'mantra' to a Muslim. He thought of a way out. He lay down on the stairs on the banks of Ganga on the way that Swamiji used to take on his way back. It was dawn and still not so bright. Light had not broken through completely. Swami Ramanand was returning after taking a bath. While climbing the stairs, his foot suddenly touched Kabir. He immediately uttered words—'Ram, Ram'.

That was it—Kabir got the initiatory 'mantra'. He began chanting 'Ram Ram'.

This is the story of Kabir seeking initiation from Ramanand.

There are two views on Kabir's marriage too. The 'Kabirpanthis' (followers of Kabir) say that Kabir remained a bachelor all his life. However, the names of 'Loyee' and 'Dhania' are repeatedly mentioned in the verses of Kabir. It is believed that 'Loyee' was the name of Kabir's wife. It is also said that Kabir had a son called Kamaal and a daughter named Kamaali.

Kabir was a lively and carefree person from the beginning. After all, when did he ever worry about his food and clothes? Like his father, Neeru, he took to weaving and earned his living by weaving clothes. Kabir was not a saint who would eat by begging alms. He used to fill his stomach by doing work and in his free time used to chant the name of God. He used to really despise religious hypocrisy. Selfless people and those with a sense of social

service always worry for others. He always used to sing this—

Sai eta deejaye jaame kutumb samaaye

Lord give me only as much which can sustain the family

Mein bhi bhookha na rahoon, sadhu na bhookha jaaye

May I not starve and may not a saint go back hungry
(from my house)

Or

Sadhu sangrah na kare, udar samaata le

A saint never accumulates, takes only as much, as is
required to fill up the stomach,

Aage peechhe Hari khade, jo maange so de.

The Lord is ubiquitous, he grants all that one asks for'.

Kabir's devotion was one of knowledge. He neither liked visiting temples, nor mosques. He considered God to be omnipresent. Wherever he would spot an evil, he would say so in clear terms. He was never afraid of using harsh and unpalatable words. He would tell the Muslims *Kankar pathar jor ke masjid lai chinaaye* (Putting together pebbles and stones, a mosque has been constructed), *taa chadhi mulla baang de, bahira bhaya khudai'* (Climbing atop, the Mulla (Muslim priest) gives out a prayer call (like a crowing cock), as if the God were deaf.)

To the Hindus, Kabir would say—

Paathar pooje hari mile, to mein pujoon pahar

(If God could indeed be attained by worshipping stones, I may
as well worship the mountain,)

Taate yeh chaki bhali, pees khaaye sansaar.

(Rather than that, this grinding mill is much better, Which
feeds the humanity.)

Saint Kabir did not like the dogmatism and false claims, of any religion. He would use harsh and unpalatable words for hypocrites belonging to both religions, Muslims and Hindus, made fun of both and took both of them to task. He could not endure falsehood and

injustice. Hence, those castes, which were worthy of compassion and, had been trampled upon, and those which were unhappy, or suppressed with the ostentation of both the religions, were mostly his devotees. Saint Kabir would say everything in their language. He imparted courage to the 'Harijans' (untouchables) who were victims of untouchability and other social evils and took those Hindus, who called themselves members of upper castes to task. Hence, the downtrodden and the oppressed people of lower castes considered Kabir to be their helper and a friend. Thus, the scholars, Muslim priests and narrow-minded people, who believed in caste inequalities became enemies of Kabir.

It is said that a Muslim Sultan (King) by the name of Sikandar Lodhi did not at all like the criticism of Muslims by Kabir. He once got Kabir chained and thrown into the Ganga. However, God was kind to him, the chains were broken and he swam out of the Ganga. Similarly, it is said that once Kabir was thrown in the way of a rampaging elephant. However, when the elephant came near Kabir, it calmed down and went away in the other direction.

Kabir had compassion for all life forms and loved everyone. That is why he used to say—

Pothi padh-padh jag mua, pandit bhaya no koye

("Even after reading scores of books, the world became good for nothing, and none became a scholar,)

Dhai akshar prem ke, padhe so pandit hoye.

(One who reads two-and-a-half words of love is the real scholar".)

He conveyed all his knowledge in straight-forward and simple language. His language is a mixture of Bhojpuri, Rajasthani, Punjabi, Arabic and Persian. Kabir's language is very effective. Kabir would convey the most profound thing in such a simple manner, that it had a direct impact on one's heart. He did not follow the rules of the language but whatever he wanted to say, he would definitely convey it to the people.

Like language, his religion too was the essence of all other

religions and views. He had adopted the good points of all religious views. Whatever he said through his verses and couplets, also exists in *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, in Buddhism, in the Yoga of ascetics and the Sufi sect of Islam. His religion was emotive and knowledge-based. He talked of his religion as 'Sahaj Dharma' (simple religion). 'Sahaj Dharma' was that natural religion, which could be followed by the common man. This was the time when the Hindu society was on the decline. Hypocrisy had increased. Breaking the shackles of hypocrisy, only a carefree saint like Kabir could have summoned the courage to teach 'simple religion'. Otherwise, who could have tread this difficult path, where except troubles and criticism, little else could be expected. Saying such things at that time was walking on thorns. But Kabir was fearless. He would never be afraid of saying whatever he deemed to be correct. 'Who is a true Hindu and a true Muslim?' Kabir has narrated it thus—

So Hindu, so Mussalman,

(He is a Hindu, he is a Muslim,)

Jaaka Durus Rahe Imaan

(One whose belief remains steadfast,)

So Brahmin jo kathe Brahm

(He is a Brahmin, who utters the name of Supreme Spirit,)

Qazi so jaane Rehman.

(A Muslim judge is one who understands God (Rehman))

Kabir was truly learned and a devotee. He used to say that God is but one, it does not make any difference, whether you call Him by different names, call him Ram, or Rahim, the meaning of both is God. He should be worshipped. Despite being involved in propagation of love, truth and service, he would always keep chanting the name of Ram. He would become his (God's) wife and at times, he would make Him the mother, while he himself would become a child, saying—"Oh Lord! You are the mother and I am thy son!" Kabir was dear to everyone because of his virtuosity. It is said that when he died, a fight ensued between Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus said that as he was a Hindu, they will

perform the last rites and will construct a 'samadhi'. The Muslims said that he was a Muslim, they will construct a grave. The conflict was not being settled.

It is said that in the end, when the piece of cloth was taken off, there was nothing except flowers. Muslims took half of the flowers away and a grave was constructed. Hindus took the remaining half away and constructed a 'Samadhi'. Kabir passed away at Maghar in 1518 A.D (1575 according to Saka calendar), at the age of about 120 years.

During the times of Kabirdas, unity between Hindus and Muslims, was a major challenge. Fearlessly, he laid the foundations of the unity between Hindus and Muslims and emphasized that treating each other with love and kindness is the true religion. It was Kabir who first proclaimed without fear that the God of all religions is one and we all are children of the same almighty, may we be Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or Christians, all are our brethren.

What Kabir had said several hundred years ago, was repeated throughout his life by Gandhiji. Gandhiji was very fond of listening to devotional song of Kabir, *Ram kaho ya Rahim kaho, matlab to usi ki yaad se hai*—"chant the name of Ram, or Rahim, the real intention is to remember Him".

Saint Kabir is among those great personalities of India, who during his time, showed the country the right path to understand religion and society and gave to its people the message of truth, love, unity and humanity.

NANAK

—Rameshchandra 'Prem'

THE founder of Sikh religion, Guru Nanakdev, was born in 1469 A.D, about 35 miles south-west of Lahore, at a village called Rai Goi Talwandi (Nankana Sahib) in a Khatri family. His father's name was Mehta Kaloo and mother's name was Tripta. Mehta was the Patwari (Village Land Record officer) of Kalu village.

It is said that Nanakdev had great faith in God since childhood. He used to tell his friends, "If you want to play a new game, do as I say. Be seated like me and chant 'Satya Kartaar' (God is truth) within yourself."

When Nanakdev turned seven, his father took him to Gopal Pandit for pursuing studies. Gopal Pandit very affectionately made Nanak sit next to him and asked him to read. Nanakdev asked the teacher—"Sir, what will you teach me?"

The teacher said, "I will teach you accounts for shopkeeping, mathematics and other books."

Hearing this, Nanakdev replied, "I will not undertake such studies. These studies will be left behind in this transient world. I will undertake such a study which will serve me even during my dying moments."

His teacher was amazed at hearing this and could do nothing and kept staring at Nanakdev.

When his father saw that his son was not interested in studying Hindi and Mathematics, he thought of something and took him to Brijlal Pandit to teach him Sanskrit and then to Maulvi Qutubuddin to teach him Persian. However, even both these teachers were amazed at little Nanak's knowledge. Nanak did not agree even to learn Sanskrit and Persian. Nanakdev's father was convinced that it was futile to make him read and write. Hence, he began sending Nanak to take the cattle for grazing. He would take the buffaloes to the pastures and sit there and meditate on God.

One day, while he was in deep meditation, his buffaloes entered the fields of a 'Jat' (a farmer) and damaged a section of his field. The farmer complained to the headman of the village. The headman called Nanak and asked him, "Why did you damage his fields with your buffaloes?"

Nanakdev immediately replied, "The one damaging, or protecting is God himself. If he has destroyed, he will recreate it too. You and I cannot do anything about it."

It is said that the headman was astonished to hear the reply from the child and did not know what to say.

Nanakdev had an elder sister—Nankiji. She had already been married. She used to love Nanakdev a lot. When she saw that their father was angry with him, she requested her husband to and brought him to her house in Sultanpur. On his arrival in Sultanpur, Nanakdev took care of the provision store of Daulat Khan Lodhi and began selling the wares.

When Nanakdev turned 18, he was married to Sulakshana Devi, the daughter of Moolchandraji. Sulakshana Devi bore two sons—Srichandra and Lakshmidas.

Till now, Nanakdev was somehow running the provision store. But to many people, he would give the goods without charging any money from them. He would say that just because someone did not have money, should that person be, not given the necessary goods? Due to Nanakdev's kindness, the poor started getting goods free of cost.

On one occasion, a strange incident happened to him. He was weighing flour for a person. One *ser* (equivalent to 2 lbs), two *sers*, three *sers*, four *sers*.....the counting went on fine till the number 12. However, as soon as he started saying '*tera*' (13 in Hindi) *ser*, he did like it as '*tera*' also meant your in Hindi. He argued that nothing in the world is his, everything is '*tera*' (your-God's). Saying so, he gave away the entire quantity of flour to that person. The result was that he was removed from the provision store the very same day.

Nanakdev tried his utmost to erase the feelings of ill-will and animosity among people throughout his life. He used to say, "There

are no Hindus and no Muslims. All are the creations of the same Almighty." He would say that no one is evil in this world. Rather than looking at the shortcomings of others, we should first look at our own faults and try to remove them, only then can our life be successful. Serving others was really the ideal in Guru Nanak's life.

Nanakji was a great social reformer of his times. He strongly denounced untouchability, superstitions and other such hypocrisy and tried to explain the importance of virtuous deeds, love for human beings and co-operation. He imparted to the people the message of living in harmony. He was a staunch supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity. He said that everyone's God was one and the same. Guru Nanak started undertaking visits within the country and abroad to spread the teachings of happiness and peace.

First of all, he went to Aijnabad and stayed with a carpenter called Lalo and from there he proceeded to Gaya, Kashi, Haridwar and Jagannath Puri. After this, he went towards South India and visited places like Rameshwaram, Arbudgiri and Lanka (Ceylon) and propagated his religion. After returning from the South, he visited Garhwal, Hemkunt, Tehri, Sirmaur, Gorakhpur, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet and propagated his teachings. During his fourth and last visit, he went upto Mecca, enroute Baluchistan. On this visit, he preached the teachings of 'Satya Naam' (the true name) in Iran, Kandhar, Kabul and Baghdad. He preached that all the tasks in this world are accomplished with the will of the Almighty and hence one should remember God by eliminating petty fights, differences of superior and inferior. A person who keeps busy with compassion, duty, politeness, love and truth, only such a person finds comfort in life.

The teachings of Nanakdev had such a profound impact on people of all religions that many people would become his disciples instantly and would repose deep faith in him.

Guru Nanak's way of preaching too was a unique one. When he was in Arabia, he once went to sleep with his feet pointed in the direction of Mecca. At this, the religious heads (Maulvis, Qazis) got very angry and said, "Do not sleep with your feet pointed in the direction of the abode of Allah."

Guru Nanak replied, "But Qaziji, kindly put my feet in the direction in which Allah is not present."

Everyone was astonished at this and just kept staring at him. They could not understand that in which direction the feet of Guru Nanak should be placed, because the religious head knew that God is omnipresent.

This was Guru Nank's way of preaching his point to the people in such plain and simple language and in an uncomplicated manner. That is why, his teachings had such a huge impact on people and they bowed their heads before him.

Another incident on his greatness goes like this—once Nanakdev's father asked him to buy some commodities like salt, turmeric etc. from the village, Chuhadhkhana, in Gujranwala district (of modern day Pakistan). On the way, Nanakdev met some naked saints. He spent all the money he had, on them and on being asked, he said, "I have done a 'Sachcha Sauda' (carried out a real bargain)."

Guru Nanak had visited the pilgrimage centres of all the religions like Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism. Everywhere he used to preach about remembering 'Satya Karta' (God) and impressed adherents of all religions equally. Hence, be they Hindus, or Muslims, Jains or Buddhists, everybody respected him and several amongst them even became his disciples.

Nanakdev had two favourite disciples—Bala and Mardana, who were always by his side and there are a number of popular legends about them. Once, Nanakdev reached a place called Hassan Abdal. A conceited saint named Baba Wali Kandhari used to live there. Incidentally, there was only one source of water in the region, which was under his control. Despite repeated requests by Mardana, when he refused to give water for Nanakdev, then Nanakdev split the ground to create a water source for himself. The source of the water for the saint (Baba Kandhari) dried up. Angered, he rolled down a portion of the mountain, which Nanakdev stopped with his toes (Panja). The mark of his toe was left behind on the stone. Today, a big Gurudwara (place of worship of Sikhs)

has been constructed at this spot. This is popularly known as Gurudwara Panja Sahib.

After travelling around for 25 years, Guru Nanak settled down in Kartarpur and started preaching there.

At the same place in 1538 A.D in the month of Asvin (seventh month of the Hindu calendar) on the tenth day of the moonlit half of the fortnight, Guru Nanakdev's soul left for its heavenly abode. At the time of his death, several disciples had gathered around him. Now Hindu and Muslim disciples began to fight amongst themselves for the possession of his body. Hindus began to say that he was our teacher (Guru), hence we will perform the last rites. On the other hand, the Muslims began saying that he was their saint. Hence, they will bury him.

It was not a matter of pride that the very same differences of caste and creed that Guru Nanak tried to eradicate throughout his life, should lead to differences amongst his disciples. However, when the disciples removed the sheet covering his body, they found that his body was not there. There were only some flowers left behind. Both the parties took half of their share and performed the final rites, according to their respective religious customs. The same story is narrated about Kabir too.

Guru Nanak passed away, but his teachings still pervade our hearts and soul. He was a renouncer and a saint. He was of the firm belief that everything in this world is a myth and nothing is permanent. Hence, he emphasized that one who does not do charitable work after taking birth as a human being, his life is useless. A famous couplet about Guru Nanakdev says—

Guru Nanak Shah Fakir,

(Guru Nanak is a king among saints),

Hindu ka Guru, Mussalman ka Peer.

(The teacher of Hindus, the saint of Muslims)

SURDAS

—Shreenath Singh

AMONG the 'Bhakti' poets in Hindi, the place of Surdas is in no way inferior to that of Tulsidas. Surdas has given a lot to Hindi literature.

The exact year of his birth and demise cannot be ascertained accurately. However, there is no doubt that he existed during the times of Emperor Akbar. His mention appears in 'Ain-e-Akbari'. However, just as these days, every blind person who can sing even a little bit, comes to be called 'Surdas', even during those days, there were several blind persons and many with only one eye, who began to be called 'Surdas' because they sang devotional songs and hymns. Among them, three 'Surdas' became highly popular.

Out of these 'Surdas', one was Bilvamangal, about whom it is said that he had himself pierced both his eyes with a needle and thus became 'Surdas'. The real name of the other 'Surdas' was Madan Mohan. He used to sing and dance in the court of Akbar and because of being 'Soordhwaj', began to be called 'Sur'. The third 'Surdas' was the one, who despite being blind since his birth, composed *Sursagar* and because of whom the name 'Surdas' got immortalised in Hindi literature.

It has already been mentioned that nothing can be said with certainty about the birth and death of Surdas. But from available evidence till now, it appears that Surdas was born in 1483 (in 1540, according to Saka era). Hence, 'Surdas' had a lifespan of 102 years.

In addition to *Sursagar*, he composed two other works. One was called *Sursaaravali* and the other was called *Sahityalahri*.

In *Sahityalahri*, Surdas has given a brief introduction about his family. He has narrated an account of the family, according to the then existing mythological style. Surdas has written that King Prithu once performed a *yagya* (a Hindu ritual of worship). A divine man originated from the sacred fire of the *yagya*. Brahma

named the divine man, Brahmarao. Chandrabhatt (Chand Vardaai) was born into the same family of Brahmarao. Chandrabhatt received great respect and honour at the court of the Emperor of Delhi, Prithivraj. The same Chandrabhatt composed a work titled, *Prithvirajraso*. In the family of the same Chandrabhatt, Harchandra was born. He was the grandfather of Surdas. Surdas, whose real name was Surajchandra, had seven brothers and he was the youngest and blind since his birth. Six of his brothers were killed in a war. After the demise of his six brothers, Surdas became detached from the world and set out from his house. Being blind, he fell down into a well and remained inside the well for seven days. It is said that on the seventh day, Lord Krishna, provided him salvation and granted him divine vision. Since that time, Surdas started living at Braj and immersed himself in the devotion of Lord Krishna.

The above-mentioned anecdote has been recounted by Surdas himself. It has been attempted to remove the veil of the mythological character behind this tale to take a guess that the ancestors of Surdas were Brahmanas, propagators of 'Brahm' (knowledge). In this Brahmin-clan, it was first Chandrabhatt during the times of Prithviraj and later on, Surajchandra who was born in the times of Emperor Akbar. Surajchandra was blind since birth as it is, he also fell into the well of ignorance. Lord Krishna granted him a favour and gave him divine vision to pull him out of the pit of ignorance. Thus, having got the divine vision, he composed one lakh verses. The fact of writing one lakh verses is accepted by Surdas himself. "*Taa din tein Hari leela gaahe, ek 'lakshya pad band'*". For days composing verses about the playful activities of Hari (Krishna) was the only aim. (The word 'lakshya' has also been taken to mean one lakh).

However, only seven thousand verses, written by Surdas, are actually available. It could also be that 'Ek lakshya pad band' might have meant that he had only one goal and having got the target, he wrote versified compositions with a single-minded perseverance. However, even seven thousand verses is no less a number and their collection being titled *Sursagar* is but only meaningful.

It has already been mentioned that Surdas lived during the times of Emperor Akbar. It is said that on one occasion, after hearing a verse composed by Surdas sung by Tansen, Akbar expressed a desire to meet Surdas. Surdas was in Mathura at that time. Scholars of Sur's literature have opined that Akbar went to Mathura to have a meeting with Surdas. According to some scholars, the meeting between Surdas and Akbar took place at Delhi. Others feel that these two great personalities met at Prayag (Allahabad), when Akbar had gone for the construction of a fort and a dam.

It appears that Akbar was not entirely satisfied with Bilvamangal Surdas and Madan Mohan Surdas. When the fame of Surdas—the composer of *Sursagar* reached his ears, this great ruler who used to scout for 'men-jewels' of his times to adorn his court, looked for the real Surdas and met him. However, his attempt to call him over to Delhi and retain him at his court was not successful. Surdas had devoted his life in the service of Lord Krishna.

During those very days, there lived another great person, who to Surdas, appeared even greater than Akbar. Surdas much preferred to remain in his service. This great personality was Acharya Vallabhacharya. He was a great preacher of Vaishnava religion. After achieving a universal conquest in the South, when he came to the North, having heard the fame of Surdas, set out to meet Surdas. At that time, Surdas was living as a monk at Goghat. This place was situated between Agra and Mathura. Acharya Vallabh had got a small temple constructed at Goverdhan to worship his family deity. This temple was popularly known as Shrinath temple. All arrangements had been made for offering prayers and for worshipping in this temple. Only arrangements for singing devotional songs (Kirtans) remained. Vallabhacharya reached Goghat to seek the co-operation of Surdas in this regard.

When Surdas received the news of the arrival of the universal conqueror of South—Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya at Goghat, he personally went across to meet him. The Acharya (teacher) made Surdas sit next to him affectionately and asked him to sing verses from the devotional songs (Kirtans). Surdas sang the verse '*Hon*

Hari Sab Patitan ko Nayak' (May Hari be the leader of all downtrodden).

Acharya then said, "being blind, why do you beg for mercy. Why don't you describe the charismatic activities of the Lord?"

Surdas replied, "Sir, I know nothing."

Then, Acharya gave him initiation and recited portions of *Bhagavata* and also recited 'Purushottam Sahasranam' (One thousand names of Lord Krishna). The charismatic stories and wisdom of the entire *Bhagavata* got etched on the heart of Surdas. He took initiation from Vallabhacharya and got all his disciples initiated from him and took everyone along to Braj. On reaching Govardhan, Acharya got Surdas a glimpse (Darshan) of Shrinathji. Surdas, then sang this verse—

Ab mein naachyo bahut Gopal. (I have now danced a lot Gopal, Gopal being another name for Lord Krishna). After hearing this, Acharya was greatly pleased and said—"Surdas, now there is no nescience left in you."

Till now, Surdas had been engrossed in humility. He used to consider himself to be a servant of God and composed and sang verses in devotion of the Lord. Now, he began to describe the birth and charismatic activities of Lord Krishna.

All the verses of *Sursagar* can be divided into two parts. The first part comprises verses of devotion, which he had composed before he met Vallabhacharya. The second part consists of verses on activities of the Lord, which he composed after he had met Acharya. There are thousands of verses in *Sursagar*, which are verses on activities of the Lord and which people to this day sing in the form of devotional songs (Bhajans) and still do not feel satiated.

Surdas has worshipped God not only as the master and as a friend, but also in the form of a son. The verses of his devotion are full of affection. The description of the childish pranks of Lord Krishna is so alluring, that on reading, or listening to it, the image of a little, naughty and a loveable child crops up. One begins to envision God even in an ordinary child. These verses of Surdas

have enhanced the importance of little boys and girls in Indian society. As a result of this, parents begin to find the same virtues in cute, adorable children, which Surdas had imagined in little Krishna. Thus, these verses help the children in becoming great citizens.

Surdas had spent all his life in the service of Lord Krishna. From dawn to dusk, he was engrossed, physically as well as mentally, in worshipping the form of Lord Krishna. This method of worship of Vaishnavites is known as 'Pushtimarg'. Mahatma Surdas has described the feeling of serving the god in Vaishnavites through his songs. In his songs, he becomes Yashoda to wake up the little Krishna, feeds him, gives him a bath, for instance—"*Jaagiye Gopal baal bhor bhayo pyaare*" (Wake up child Gopal, it is daybreak, my dear). "*Abahi Yashoda Maakhan Laayee*" (Yashoda will get butter for you right away) "*Jasumati Jabahi Kahyo Anhaawan Roy Gaye Hari Lotat Ree*" (Whenever Jasumati scolded him, Hari began to cry and roll on the floor).

"*Jenwat Kanha Nand ki Kaniya*" (The young Kanha plays in the lap of Nanda).

'Sur' means the sun. In the verses of *Sursagar* he has given 'Sur', 'Suraj', or 'Surajdas' as his names. The word 'Sur' became most popular because it was the shortest and perhaps because of his being blind since his birth, it became synonymous with the blind. So much so, that if today a blind person is called 'Surdas', he will feel very happy and proud. In this way, whereas the verses by Surdas delight those who are blessed with sight, on the other hand, his life paves the way for the blind. Those who are blind draw this lesson from his life that even if they do not possess eyes, they can lend substance to their life through devotion to God.

SHER SHAH SURI

—Hansraj Rahbar

SHER Shah's real name was Farid and he was the son of an ordinary landholder. He earned the name 'Sher Khan' through his bravery.

Sher Shah's grandfather was an Afghan of 'Sur' tribe. He used to live near Peshawar. Soldier by profession, he set out in search of a job towards the east. His son, Hassan, accompanied him. Both began living in modern-day Punjab at a place called Bajwada (an administrative division), near the town of Hoshiarpur. It was there that Farid was born in the year 1472. Farid was still a child, when Hassan got a job with a 'Subedar' (Governor) of Jaunpur. He gave away Sahasram as landed property to Hassan. Hassan went to Sahasram along with his family.

Farid had a stepmother too. She wanted that after his father's death, her son should get the landed estate of Sahasram, hence Farid used to be an eye-sore for her. She had a strong influence on Hassan, hence he too began to ill-treat Farid. Because of their behaviour young Farid used to be very sad. Consequently he left Sahasram and went to Jaunpur. It was here that struggle began in his life and troubles began to steel him up.

First of all, he decided to complete his studies. Farid's talent pleased his master Jamaal so much that he told Hassan, "Your son is very capable, why don't you benefit from his abilities?"

– "Is he very capable?"

– "Yes, he is very capable and I feel that if fortune favours him, he will make a name for himself."

There is no father who does not become happy on hearing about his son's ability. As it is, Hassan used to trust Jamaal Khan. He called Farid and handed him over the task of managing the landed property at Sahasram and Khwaspur. Farid managed the estates

so well that those who saw it were astonished. However, Farid's stepmother burned with jealousy. Poor Farid had to again leave Sahasram and go to Agra. However, when his father died, Farid occupied the landed estate through a royal decree (firman). In the year 1522, he started working with Nawab Bahar Khan Lohani of Bihar and soon pleased the Nawab with his hard work and honesty. One day Bahar Khan went out for hunting, Farid was with him. When they reached the forest, a lion attacked them suddenly. The lion was about to kill the Nawab, when Farid bravely stepped forward and killed the lion single-handedly. Pleased with him, Bahar Khan bestowed on him the title—'Sher Khan' and from that day onwards, he began to be called 'Sher Khan', instead of Farid. Besides this, Bahar Khan also appointed him as his lawyer, as well as the tutor for his son, Jalaal Khan.

Several enemies of Farid tried to poison Nawab's ears, as a result of which the landed estate of Sahasram was taken away from him. At that time, Babar was the Emperor of Delhi. Considering the prevailing circumstances, Sher Shah took up a job with the Mughal army. In this way, the experience that he gained stood him in good stead later on.

After a little more than a year, Bahar Khan died. Sher Khan returned to Bihar again and having become the guardian of his disciple, Jalaal Khan started ruling in his name. Gradually, within four years, he won over a majority of the army to his side. In the meantime, the ruler of Chunar, Taj Khan was killed at the hands of his son. His widow, Laal Mallika, married 'Sher Khan' and handed over the fort of Chunar to him.

Seeing the progress made by Sher Khan, Jamaal Khan became worried. He made an attempt to wean away this dictator, but was not successful.

Worried, Jamaal Khan came to Bengal and sought help from its king, Mahmud Shah. Mahmud Shah too was afraid of the increasing might of Sher Khan. He immediately agreed to help Jamaal Khan. The combined armies launched an attack on Sher Khan. A battle was fought at Surajgarh, in which the king of Bengal and the Afghan chieftains were defeated. This victory has a great

deal of significance in the life of Sher Khan. Had he not been victorious, he would never have been able to become a great Emperor.

When Humayun and Gujarat's king, Sultan Bahadur Shah were engaged in fighting, Sher Khan seized this opportunity and quietly launched an attack on Bengal. Sultan Mahmud Shah did not have the courage to fight the Afghans. He had already witnessed the might of Sher Khan. Hence, he gave away three lakh gold coins and a lot of territory and sought a compromise. This enhanced the might and prestige of Sher Khan. On the other hand, in Gujarat, Humayun had defeated Bahadur Shah. Consequently, several Afghan chieftains joined forces with their new leader, Sher Khan.

On his return from Gujarat, Humayun began to indulge in merry-making at Agra. However, Sher Khan again attacked Bengal with his new Afghan chieftains. This time Sher Khan's intention was to annex Bengal and merge it with his kingdom. He surrounded and laid siege to Gaur, the capital of Bengal. When Humayun got the news of the attack, he was taken aback. Taking advantage of the then existing conditions, Sher Khan took control of Gaur in April 1538.

Humayun was unsuccessful in winning over Chunar and in 1538, marched towards Gaur. Sher Khan had by now, gained plenty of experience in warfare. He did not want to fight Humayun in Bengal. Hence, he retreated from Gaur on his own and started plundering and winning over Mughal territories in Bihar, Jaunpur and Kannauj.

In the meantime, rains had set in. Humayun was, by nature, lazy and a pleasure-seeker. He began the victory celebrations in Gaur and woke up from his trance, only when Sher Khan had established his control over most of the territories and had cut off all his routes to Agra. Humayun hastily left Bengal for Agra. However, Sher Khan himself came in his way. A fierce battle took place. Most of the Mughal soldiers were either captured, or drowned in the river. Humayun too jumped into the Ganges with his horse. He was about to drown in the river, when a water-carrier saved him with the help of his leather water bag and helped him cross the river.

As promised when Humayun became the Emperor, he gave the kingdom to the same water-carrier, Baccha Sakka, for one day. Baccha Sakka issued a leather coin in his name on that day.

Sher Khan was now the ruler of a large territory, from Kannauj to Assam and Chhatgaon. He celebrated this victory on a large-scale and took the title of Emperor and Sher Khan became Sher Shah. He streamlined the management of the territories he had won over and strengthened his kingdom.

Even after repeated attempts, Humayun could not elicit the co-operation of his brothers. Hence, the next year, he attacked Sher Shah on his own. On May 17, 1540 Mughal and Afghan forces came face-to-face at Kannauj. Sher Shah had 50,000 soldiers and Humayun's army had one lakh soldiers. However, the Mughal army was not well organized and its officers were indolent and pleasure seekers and the morale of the soldiers was already low. Without even a single shot being fired, the battle had been won by the Afghans. Humayun fled to save his life and roamed around for 15 years. Sher Shah entered Delhi with great fanfare and became the Emperor of India.

Sher Shah remained the Emperor of Delhi for five years. His singularity, or greatness, lies not in the fact that he rose from the ranks of an ordinary feudal lord to become the Emperor of Delhi. There have been several other persons, who were born in an ordinary family and still made progress. Sher Shah's uniqueness lies in the fact that he accomplished so much of work in such a short span of time that we are left astonished on reading about it. Being an Indian, he was familiar with the Indian tradition. He knew what type of system should be in place with the changing times. He enjoyed the confidence and support of his Pathan chieftains, besides the Hindus. With their co-operation, he brought about sweeping reforms in the administrative system. Later on, Akbar the Great, strengthened the foundations of his empire on the basis of these reforms.

Sher Shah rolled out a network of roads to connect one part of his empire to the other. Actually, these roads established unity

in the country. One can still see one such longest road—Grand Trunk Road. This road was got constructed by Sher Shah. It connected Kolkata to Peshawar. He got shaded trees planted on both sides of the road and got constructed post offices and inns for travellers. These post offices took mail from one part of the country to another. The Emperor's spies too used to send him news from all over the country.

One of the first tasks that Sher Shah accomplished was to divide his kingdom into 47 divisions for administrative convenience. Sher Shah used to personally supervise the work of his officers. Like, Ashoka the Great and Harshvardhan his principle was that the top brass should always be functionally active.'

Unfortunately, this extremely able and great ruler died at quite a young age. It is said that once he had laid siege to a fort and in that fort on May 22, 1545, due to a blast in a tunnel Sher Shah lost his life.

CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU

—Jagannath Prabhakar

CHAITANYA MAHAPRABHU was born in the year 1485 on the day of 'Holi' in the town of Navadweep. His father's name was Pandit Jagannath Mishra and that of his mother was Shachi Devi.

He was named Vishvambhar. He was extremely good-looking and fair-complexioned. People named him 'Gaurang' (one with fair complexion), but his mother used to call him 'Nimai' affectionately. This name proved to be more popular. The same Nimai, in the end, began to be universally worshipped by the name of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He had an elder brother whose name was Vishwaroop.

On the occasion of the naming ceremony, his temperament was put to test. Clothes, weapons, money, books etc. were put before him. The tiny-tot Nimai, crawled forward, reached out and placed his hand on *Shrimadbhagavat*. Thus, it was as if, since his childhood, he had proclaimed his love for *Bhagavata*. Nimai was very naughty and restless since his childhood. Seeing his playful activities, one was reminded of the childhood of Krishna. It is said that one day, a black cobra was spotted in his house. On seeing Nimai, the cobra coiled up and squatted right in front of him. Nimai fearlessly began to caress the hood of the cobra with his little fingers. The cobra was swaying to and fro and the young Nimai was laughing and letting out joyful shrieks. Seeing this scene, his mother and elder brother, who had just arrived at that moment, began to tremble with fear. They were nonplussed and did not know what to do. Seeing his mother, Nimai left the cobra and rushed to embrace his mother. The cobra went along its way.

One day a Brahmin came to Nimai's house. His father accorded a warm welcome to the Brahmin. His mother gave him food kept aside for Brahmins as alms. The Brahmin cleaned up and tidied the kitchen. Before eating the food, he closed his eyes to remember

Lord Vishnu and offer food to the Lord. Precisely at that moment, little Nimai appeared from nowhere. He put his fingers into the food and started eating. Seeing this, the Brahmin got irritated, "Oh! whose child is this?"

In those days, great care was taken to keep the kitchen and the food pure. Brahmins used to cook the food themselves and if someone else would enter the kitchen, the food used to become impure on Nimai taking it. The kitchen of that Brahmin and the food was rendered impure. When Jagannath Mishra heard this, he came running and wanted to catch hold of Nimai and beat him up, but the Brahmin prevented him.

After a lot of persuasion by Shachi Devi, the Brahmin cooked the food again. This time, Nimai was taken away and tied with a rope. The Brahmin again closed his eyes and began offering food to the Lord. However, at that moment, no one knows how Nimai broke free of the ropes and again put his hand into the food. No one could know how he had managed to free himself from the rope. The Brahmin's food became impure again. He thought that today food was not in his destiny, hence he decided to go hungry. However, at the request of Shachi Devi and Jagannath Mishra, the Brahmin prepared the meals yet again. On the other hand, Nimai was again tied with a rope and to ensure that Nimai may not free himself and run away, his elder brother sat near him. The apprehension was that naughty Nimai might come up with a prank.

This time, when the Brahmin closed his eyes to offer food to the God, he saw a strange scene in his trance. It appeared to him as if Lord Vishnu manifested himself and appearing before him and saying, "on your invitation, I had come to you twice in the form of a child. But you did not recognize me, now tell me what do you want?"

The Brahmin had now understood. The Lord himself had accepted the offering of the food in the form of little Nimai. The Brahmin offered apology to the Lord. The God granted him one boon of his choice and disappeared.

Nimai would win over every heart by his childish pranks. In his neighbourhood, he would devour whatever he could get to eat by snatching. He would be unmindful of caste and community.

Nimai was extremely good at studies too. At a very young age, he had become quite a good scholar of Sanskrit. He had just turned 11, when his father passed away. Before this, his elder brother Vishwaroop, dreading marriage, had fled from the house. It is understood that he has renounced. However, despite a desperate search for him, there was no trace of him.

The entire burden of the household had now dawned upon the young Nimai. Even though Nimai was a child, he did not panic. He consoled his mother and began to look after her. He even found time for studies. He studied jurisprudence from the school of a renowned scholar of jurisprudence, Vasudev Saarbhaum. At the age of 16, he had become a scholar par excellence in law. He defeated famous scholars in debates on scriptures.

During his student life, Nimai had authored an excellent treatise on jurisprudence. When his classmate, Raghunath Shiromani, came to know that Nimai had written a book, he approached Nimai Pandit. At his friend's instance, Nimai read out the book to him. While listening to it, tears swelled in Raghunath's eyes. Nimai was very surprised. When he asked him the reason, Raghunath said, "Nimai, I too have written a book on jurisprudence. However, it is nothing compared to your book. Your book is really well written. All my effort has gone waste. That's all. Thinking about all this, tears have swelled in My eyes."

Nimai Pandit possessed a very tender heart. He considered everyone to be like him. Hence, he became upset at seeing Raghunath sad. He said, "My dear friend, why are you disturbed over such a trivial issue?"

Saying this, he threw away the book written by him into the Ganges, in the presence of Raghunath. Raghunath Shiromani was left speechless at seeing this affection and sacrifice on the part of Nimai Pandit. That book of Nimai was absorbed forever in the waters of Ganges, but the book on jurisprudence written by Raghunath Shiromani, titled 'Dikshit', which is available even today, is famous.

After that incident, Nimai Pandit never went to any teacher for studies. He stayed at home and started indulging in self-study. After a few days, he himself started a school, to which several students began to flock for studies.

Once Nimai Pandit went to Gaya to perform the "Shraddh" (the annual ritual) of his father.

After his departure, the town became desolate. All people appeared sad on his going away. Though he did return, he was no longer the same Nimai Pandit. He had undergone a strange transformation. After returning from Gaya, he ran the school for a few days, but he closed it soon after. One did not know what had happened to him, for in the midst of teaching, he would get lost in thought. Often, he would forget all about teaching, would get up and start dancing. Along with dancing, he would begin singing devotional songs. The name of the Lord emanated from his voice in the form of melodious music. Chanting 'Hare Krishna! Hare Krishna!'— and dancing, he would often fall down unconscious on the floor. However, soon after regaining consciousness, he would start dancing again. He would yearn at being separated from Krishna, and would lament most touchingly, would keep crying and call out in such a way, that even a stone would have been moved to pity. Then, he would not even be conscious of eating or drinking.

Within no time, the devotion of Bhagavat began to flow like a stream, from one corner of Bengal to the other. The birthplace of Nimai—Nabadweep, was the source of this stream. Here, the name of Hari began to be chanted in every household. Groups of singers would pass through the markets. Nimai Pandit would lead the procession, singing and dancing. People would spread out flowers in his way. Devotees from far off places began to flock to Nabadweep. They would surround Nimai Pandit, like moths around a lamp. For him, devotion to God was the greatest religion. He propounded such a religion, which erased the distinction between high and low, caste and creed, rich and poor, and Hindus and Muslims. The flow of his devotion was the same for everyone. Everyone would collectively take dips in the pure stream, without

any discrimination. The filth of jealousy and malice began to dissipate from their hearts.

This fame of Nimai Pandit began to spread far and wide. People began to reverentially address him as Gaurang Mahaprabhu. Some malicious people began to get jealous of him because of this name and fame. They explained to the 'Qazi' (Muslim/judge),—"Some people are getting disturbed because of the devotional songs of Nimai. Not only this, he is even converting Muslims to devotees of Krishna."

As soon as he heard this, the Qazi issued orders to ban the singing of devotional songs all over the town. But Gaurang Mahaprabhu did a strange thing in response to this order. He personally sat down right opposite the house of Qazi and started singing devotional songs. His songs had such a magical spell in them that the Qazi came out of the house on hearing the songs and started dancing. Thus, Nimai linked both Hindus and Muslims with a common thread—devotion to Lord Krishna.

In Bengal, there is a tradition of sacrificing animals during Kali Pooja. Gaurang Mahaprabhu considered animal sacrifice to be wrong. His influence helped in getting rid of this and several similar social evils.

One day, Gaurang sought renunciation. Before taking renunciation, on his mother's request, he married a second time after the death of his first wife. However, he had no interest in the household. Having taken renunciation, he began to be called 'Chaitanya'. Now Chaitanya Mahaprabhu began to roam around and preach Vaishnava religion as well as devotion towards *Bhagavata*. In this ardour, he crossed forests and rivers and reached South India. After coming into contact with him, several evil people became good and started spending a virtuous life.

His devotion and gaiety knew no bounds. In this passionate abandon, he had once jumped into a lake and on another occasion into the sea. Fortunately, on both the occasions he was pulled out alive. The intoxication of devotion overwhelmed him twenty-four hours of the day. He would not even be conscious of his physical existence.

Chaitanya died on the occasion of Rath Yatra at Jagannath Puri. At that time, he was 48 years old. His amazing life had an impact on the whole of Bengal. Not only this, a big surge of devotion for Krishna surfaced in other parts of India and let loose a stream of pure love, devoid of discrimination, which has not dried up till today.

Religion and culture have had a large hand in strengthening the unity of India. However, whenever the link between different parts of India would get weak, one or another outstanding personality was born, who would give to the people the message of unity of religions and show them the right path. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has an important place among such great personalities, we Indians will always remember him with respect.

MEERABAI

—Jagdish Goel

MEEERABAI, a famous devotional poetess of India, was a native of Rajasthan. Not much is known about the early life of Meera. It is very difficult to state anything about Meera's birth with certainty. However, it is believed that she lived in the first half of the 16th century.

You must have heard the name of Jodhpur city in Rajasthan. It was founded by Rao Jodha. Rao Jodha belonged to the Rathore clan. His son, Rao Dooda, had established the state of Merta. Rao Dooda's son, Rao Ratna Singh, was given twelve villages from the state of Merta for sustenance. In one of these villages called Kudki, Meerabai took birth in Ratna Singh's house. The name of Meerabai's mother was Kusum Kanwar. She was a Rajput from Tankni.

It is said that since her childhood, whenever Meera played the game of conducting marriages of her dolls, she developed a love for sitting next to the image of Gopal.

Meera's parents had died during her childhood. It is believed that at the time of her father's demise, she was three years old and when she was 10 years old her mother passed away. After her mother's death, Meera started living with her grandfather—Rao Dooda at Merta. Merta was situated in Marwar. Her upbringing and education took place there. Rao Dooda was an ardent Vaishnav devotee. He used to accord great respect to saints and ascetics. Gradually, the hue of love for Krishna began to rub off on Meera too.

However, after sometime, Rao Dooda too left this world. After Rao Dooda's death, his eldest son Veeramdev ascended the royal throne. Meera had grown up by now. Veeramdev got worried about finding a suitable match for her. In those days, the fame of

Sisodia dynasty of Chittor was spreading far and wide. Rana Sanga, the brightest star of the Sisodia clan, was very glorious. He was known everywhere for his valour. Veeramdev married off Meerabai to Bhojraj, the eldest prince of Rana Sanga.

Rana Sanga's family was famous for both, valour and devotion. Meera's uncle Veeramdev thought that this house would be most ideal for Meera. However, happiness was not in Meera's destiny. It is said that Meera received abundant love and respect of her husband, Rana Bhojraj. However, Meera could not enjoy this happiness for long. Rana Bhojraj passed away at a very young age. On the other hand, having lost to Babar, Rana Sanga, Meera's father-in-law, was so shocked, that he too passed away. It was, as if a mountain of troubles had befallen Meera.

The seeds of devotion to Krishna had already sprouted in Meera's heart. These incidents left Meera's sad heart thoroughly shaken up. The pain of separation began to flow through her songs. Considering Krishna to be everything, Meera sang:

*Jo tum todo piya mein nahin todoon, Tum son preet tod
Krishna, kaun sung jodoon. Tum bhaye taruvar mein teri
pankhiya, Tum bhaye sarvar, mein teri machhiya. Tum bhaye
girvar, mein bhayee mora, Tum bhaye chanda main bhayee
chakora, Tum bhaye moti, prabhu hum bhaye dhaaga, Tum
bhaye sona, hum bhaye sohaga, Meera ke prabhu Braj ke
vaasi, Tum mere Thakur, mein teri daasi,*

'Even if you break it, I won't break it, If I sever my friendship with you Krishna, with whom should I connect. you are the tree, I am your bird, You are the lake, I am your fish. You are the cloud, I am a peacock, You are the moon, I am the Partridge (a red-legged Indian bird, fabled to subsist upon moon-beams and to eat embers), You are the bead my Lord, and we are its thread, You are the gold and I am its plank, Meera's God is the inhabitant of Braj, You are my Lord and I am your servant'.

After Rana Sanga, the younger brother of Bhojraj, Ratan Singh, became the king of Mewar, but he too did not live long. Hence, Ratan Singh's stepbrother, Vikramaditya or Vikramjeet, became

the king. As changes began to manifest in the politics of Mewar, particularly in the royal family of Chittor, by and by Meera's heart began to get detached from the world and began to get immersed in the feet of her Lord. Gatherings of saints, tales of the Lord and the spiritual flow of devotional hymns of Krishna began to give Meera the impression of everything else being of little consequence.

Gradually, people began to talk in hushed tones within and outside the palace. People began to say different things about Meera. But Meera was not ready to sever, at any cost, the love-bond that she had established with Gopal. She had reached a point where she was no longer worried about safeguarding her honour amongst the people—

'Mere to Girdhar Gopal, doosro na koyee' Jaake sar mor mukut, mero pati soyee, Taat maat bhraat bandhu apna nahin koyee. Chhad dayee kul ki aan kya karihai koyee, Santan dhing baithee baithee lok laaj khoye. Chunri kiye tuk-tuk odh leenh loyee, Moti Moonge utaar ban maala poyee, Ansuan jal seench seench prem bel boyee, Ab to bel phail gayee anand phal hoyee, Doodh ki mathaniya bade prem se biloyee, Maakhan jab kaadhi liyo, chaach piye koyee, Aayee mein bhakti kaaj, jagat dekh mohee, Daasi Meera Girdhar prabhu, taro ab mohi.

'Only Girdhar Gopal (the Lord) belongs to me and no one else. On whose head rests the peacock crown, only he is my husband, father, mother, brother and kin, none is mine, I have let go of family honour, what can anyone do, sitting in the gathering of saints, I have lost my honour, the thin cloth having been torn to pieces, I have covered myself with a blanket, shorn of gems and jewels, the necklace has become ordinary, I have tendered the love-creeper with the water of my tears, now the creeper has spread everywhere to give the fruits of pleasure, I have churned the urn of milk with lot of love and affection, when the butter has been extracted, let any one drink the buttermilk, I have come for worship, the world is staring at me, Oh Lord Girdhar, now redeem your servant, Meera.'

However, the fear of losing the honour amongst the people was

worrying Rana Vikramaditya, the younger brother of Meera's husband. That a widowed daughter-in-law of a royal family and on top of that, one who was young and of an unparalleled beauty, should remain in the company of saints and sages and should sing devotional songs was getting unbearable for him. He tried to persuade Meera in every possible way. He sent several women to Meera, kept his own sister, Udabai close to Meera, but it bore no fruit. The intoxication of the love that had overcome Meera continued to rise further and did not ebb. She broke out singing.....

'Jogi mat jaa, mat jaa, mat jaa, paaye paroon mein cheri teri haun, Prem bhagati ko paidon hi nyaaro, hum koon gail bataa jaa, Agar chandan ki chita rachaoon, apne haath jalaa jaa, Jal bal gayee bhasm ke dheri, apne ang lagaa jaa, Meera ke prabhu Girdhar naagar, jot mein jot milaa jaa.'

O! Ascetic, don't go, don't, don't, just don't, I am your disciple—lying at your feet, I am immersed in devotion with love, show me the way, if I set up a pyre of sandalwood, come and light it with your hands, having been burnt to ash, let me assimilate with you, Meera's God, Girdhar, let me immerse myself into you'

Angered, Rana sent poison in the form of *charanamrit* (ambrosia from the Lord's feet) and a black cobra in a basket. However, Lord Krishna himself was the saviour of Meera, as no harm could befall her. This intimidation and giving hardships to Meera had the opposite effect. The hue of the beloved's love was getting stronger day-by-day. Meera was alert to the hardships being inflicted upon her—

'Saasu lade meri nanad khijaawe Rana rahyaa risaaye, Pahro bhi raakhyo, chauki bithaasyo taala diyo jadaaye'

Mother-in-law fights with me, sister-in-law teases me, Rana is enraged, I am being guarded and kept locked up'.

But, despite her physical presence in the palace, Meera's heart lay elsewhere and she was capable of laughing off her hardships—

'Pag ghungroo baandh Meera naachi re, Log kahen Meera bhayee baawaree, Saas kahe kulnaasi re, Zeher ka pyaala

Raanaji ne bhejaa, Peekar Meera haansi re',

Meera dances with trinklets on her feet, People say Meera has gone crazy, Mother-in-law says she is ruining the family, Ranaji sent a cup of poison, Meera drank it and laughed'.

Meera's soul had achieved such heights in her love for Krishna that she had become aware of the limits of worldly powers. She knew that if a king would get annoyed, at the most he would keep his city with him and can turn her out of the kingdom. However, if God gets annoyed, no abode shall be left. Hence, Meera rejected the orders of Rana and put her soul in singing the paeans of Govind—

*'Mein to Govind ke gun gaana, Raaja roothe nagari rakhe,
Hari roothe kahaan jaana, Dibiyaa mein kaala naag jo bhejaa,
Shaaligram kar jaana',*

I will sing about the virtues of Govind, If a king is annoyed, he will keep the city, If God gets annoyed, where does one go? When a black cobra was sent in the basket, it was transformed into the sacred black stone pervaded by the presence of Vishnu'.

The ways of Rana Vikramaditya and Meera were different. Rana was stuck up with preserving the honour among the people, while Meera had risen above the hollowness of worldly affairs. Hence, now Meera had to choose her path. She had to decide whether she would endure the hardships caused by Rana, or sever all her connections with the royal palace and become independent.

At the time Meera was in a dilemma, hearing about her troubles, her uncle Veeramdev asked her to leave Chittor. After Meera left Chittor, great misfortunes befell Chittor. Gujarat's king, Bahadur Shah, snatched Chittor away. In the end, Vikramaditya too was killed.

On the other hand, dark clouds began to hover over Merta too. Rao Maldev of Jodhpur snatched Merta from Veeramdev. In such a situation, Meera decided to undertake a pilgrimage. Thus, Meera set out from Merta. The lingering agony of love was pervading her heart. Meera began to roam around in forests and

sing—

'He ri, mein to prem diwanee, mera darad na jaane koye, Sooli upar sej hamari, kis bidh sonaa hoye, Gagan mandal pe sej piya ke, kis bidh milna hoye, Ghaayal ki gati ghaayal jaane, kee jin laayee hoye, Jauhari ki gati jauhari jaane, kee jin jauhar hoye, Darad kee maari ban-ban doloon, vaid milya nahin koye, Meera ki prabhu peer mitaigi, jab vaid saanwalia ho'.

I am crazy for love, none knows my pain, My bed is on thorns, how can one then sleep, The beloved's bed is in the sky, how to meet him. Only an injured knows the plight of the injured, And only a jeweller knows the fate of another jeweller, Afflicted by pain, I roam around in forests, but no healer was in sight. Meera's pain will subside only when the beloved Shyam is the healer'.

Meera who considered herself to be a 'Gopi' (female friend of Lord Krishna) goes looking for her beloved, leaves for Braj and reaches Vrindavan. Singing about the deeds of Krishna in the groves and streets of Vrindavan, she begins to appease her Lord—

'Shyaam mane chakar rakho jee, Girdhari laal chakar rakho jee, Chakar rahsoon baag lagaasoon nit uth darshan paasoon, Vrindavan ki kunj galin mein teri leela gaasoon, Chaakari mein darsan paoon, sumiran paoon kharchee, Bhav Bhakti jaagiree paoon, teenon baatan sarsee, Mor mukut Pitambar sohe, gal Baijanti Maala, Vrindavan mein dhenu charaave, Mohan murali waala, Hare hare nit baag lagaoon, vich vich raakhoon kyaree, Saanwariya ke darsan paoon, pahar kusumbhi saari, Jogi aaya jog karan ku, tap karne sanyaasi, Hari bhajan ku sadhu aaya, Vrindavan ke baasi, Meera ke prabhu gahari gambhira, sadaa raho jee dheera, Aadhi raat prabhu darsan deenhe, prem nadi ke teera.

Shyam, keep me as your servant, Gidhari, keep me as your servant, If I become your servant, I will daily get your glimpse, I keep singing about your charismatic activities in the streets of Vrindavan, In this servility, I may catch your glimpse, and remember you, I will get the emotion, devotion and the lordship—all three are sweet things. The peacock crown rests on the one wearing

yellow clothes, in the neck hangs the garland. Mohan—the one with the flute takes the cows for grazing in Vrindavan, I plant green trees daily and water the saplings, May I get a glimpse of the beloved, I am always awake, The sage has come to worship and the ascetic to do penance, The saint has come to sing a devotional song for Hari, oh! natives of Vrindavan, Meera's Lord is profoundly serious, so remain always steady and calm, At midnight, the Lord gives a glimpse on the banks of the river of love'.

However, it was not possible for Meera to continue staying in Vrindavan. She wanted to have a glimpse of all the places where Krishna had spent his life. Hence, Meera left Vrindavan and moved towards Dwarka. Even at Dwarka, she continued to compose songs for her Lord. In the meantime, the old splendour had returned to Chittor and Merta. Men were dispatched from there to bring her back. Meera kept refusing at first, but in the end, agreed to come back. However, before leaving Dwarka, when she went to perform a 'puja' in the temple of Ranchchorji, it is said, that she got so engrossed in 'puja' (worship) that the idol absorbed her. Hence, Meera's saga of life ended in Gujarat.

In her verses, Meera has also accepted Raidas as her teacher (Guru), for instance—

'Mharo man lago Hari jee soon, ab na rahoongi atki,

'My heart is engrossed in Hari, I won't remain stuck,

'Guru milya Raidas ji, dinhi Gyan ki Gootki,

I have got a teacher, Raidas, who has given me a small dose of knowledge'.

Side by side, it is also well known that she had got initiation from Jeev Goswami. Thus, while on the one hand, her relation with the devotees, who attribute a form (to the Lord) is proved, on the other hand, so is her relation with the devotees of attributeless form. All this leads one to assume that Meera was not the one to follow a particular sect. She would gather something or the other, from whichever place she would find devotion, or feelings.

Like other saint poets, Meera too enriched the literature of

India. Meera's language is simple and touches the heart directly. Meera's life was spent in Marwar, Mewar, Braj and Gujarat, hence the impact of these four places is evident in her language. Meera's songs have such an impact that they also colour us with their hues. This is the reason why Meera's verses are sung in households even today.

KRISHNADEVA RAYA

—Dhanesh Malhotra

KRISHNADEVA Raya was a great emperor of Vijaynagar empire in South India. Like Ashoka and Chandragupta, he too paid special attention to the progress made by his empire and the welfare of the subjects. Hence, the period of his rule is known as the golden age of the empire.

At the time of his coronation, the Vijaynagar empire had badly declined. However, this emperor, within a span of 10 years, had established the dominance of the Vijaynagar empire in entire Southern India.

The first task of Krishnadeva Raya was to defeat those Mohammedans (foreigners) who used to loot and plunder in the name of 'Jihaad' (holy war) and to extend the frontiers of his empire.

Taking advantage of the internal fights of Bijapur, Krishnadeva Raya annexed Gulbarga, Bidar and Raichur. After this, he won over Udaygiri. In this war, the Queen of Orissa and some members of the royal family had been captured. However, Krishnadeva Raya did not disrespect anyone. He made Prince Veerbhadra of Gajapati, who had been arrested, the Governor of a province, thereby giving evidence of being an astute politician. When his armies reached Cuttack, the capital of Kalinga, the Kalinga King compromised with Krishnadeva and married off his daughter to Krishnadeva. Krishnadeva Raya too returned the territories he had won over.

Like Akbar the Great, Krishnadeva Raya too respected all religions, because he considered it a good and a successful policy. He provided encouragement to Jainism. The Kings of Vijaynagara had declared—till such time the sun and moon exist, Vaishnava religion will protect Jainism.

In South India, with the arrival of the Portuguese, Christianity spread in India too. King used to invite Christian priests respectfully and listen to their religious discourses. They had permitted the priests

to propagate their religion and to construct churches. Krishnadeva Raya had recruited Muslims in a large number in his army. It is evident that during his reign, Hindus had even got mosques constructed for Muslims. Though Krishnadeva was himself a Vaishnavite, yet he provided financial assistance to the temples of Shiva. It is true that being a staunch Vaishnavite, he was sympathetic towards litterateurs, artistes and sculptors who adhered to Vaishnava religion.

Krishnadeva Raya was an able administrator and politician. He used to say, "If you feel that you can win over provinces next to your frontiers, never miss an opportunity to do so. If you cannot do so, it is better to maintain friendly relations with your neighbours and not allow the relations to deteriorate. It was his opinion that a King should employ spies to keep an eye on his ministers, because it is possible that even the most trusted minister could deceive you."

This shows that he was a great judge of human character. Take another instance of his administrative effectiveness. He used to treat foreign ambassadors very nicely. He was absolutely certain that the best way to befriend an enemy King was to accord full respect to his ambassador. Adopting this policy, he showered lots of presents on the Ambassadors of Sultans of Berar, Bidar and Golconda, though their Sultans had sent threat letters through their Ambassadors to Krishnadeva Raya.

Krishnadeva Raya's court was a grand one, which has been praised by foreign Ambassadors and travellers. Their descriptions of the grandeur of Vijaynagar, festivals, military might and the bravery of the King are interesting to read. In those days, most of South India was under Krishnadeva Raya. He had appointed Governors in provinces. They had to maintain a fixed number of horses, foot soldiers and elephants, as they had to part with a portion of their annual income to the King. The king never passed a death sentence on the kings subjugated by him. He even treated the enemies with mercy and never perpetrated atrocities on the inhabitants of the cities vanquished by him. His great military might, grand personality and humility and the sentiment of upholding the interests of the people had made him popular.

It is said that Krishnadeva Raya had 12 wives, three of whom were prominent ones. The sons of all of them were considered to be princes. Krishnadeva Raya used to live in pomp and show. He never wore clothes more than once. Usually, he would wear white-coloured clothes, which were embroidered with golden flowers. He was also very fond of clothes made of fine silk, which were decorated with golden flowers. When he used to come to battlefield, he used to be adorned above the armour with clothes studded with jewels and gold. He was also extremely fond of expensive clothes and exquisite perfumes. He was a non-vegetarian and used to relish various types of meat.

Much before dawn, he used to drink half a 'ser' (about a litre) sesame oil and would also massage with it. He would brandish exercise a sword, so that the excess oil would come out of the pores. After this, he would wrestle with a wrestler and do horse-riding till daybreak. After this, he would take a bath, perform 'puja' and then hold important discussions with the prominent officers and officials at his Court.

Krishnadeva Raya was very fond of wrestling. He used to immensely enjoy watching wrestling contests. He had a force of 1,000 wrestlers. He also had a great interest in watching animal fights and races.

Krishnadeva Raya's period can be called the 'golden age' of the History of Literature in South India. His Court was full of scholars of Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada. He was himself a good writer and used to respect authors. He had a special love for Telugu. Before penning his best work—*Amuktamalayada* in Telugu, he had authored about a dozen books in Sanskrit.

At his court, there lived eight great poets of the empire known as 'Ashtadiggaj'. The King had singular respect for these poets. His poetic work, *Amuktamalayada* is considered to be among the five greatest poetic works of Telugu language. He has given an extremely panoramic description of nature in his book. His description of the seasons, moon and dusk is extremely beautiful. Besides this, during the period of this great King, not only was a book written on medical science, but books were also written on the art of cooking.

During the reign of Krishnadeva Raya, fine arts like architecture, painting and sculpture too made a lot of progress. Paintings depicting him and his father had been drawn at the gates of his palace. In this palace, paintings depicting several postures of dances adorned the walls, because the emperor had a great interest in dance. Apart from this, paintings of various birds on the walls too looked beautiful and alluring.

As a great builder, a comparison can be made between Krishnadeva Raya and Mughal emperors. He greatly enhanced the beauty of his capital. He got temples and palaces constructed. With the help of Portuguese engineers, he made arrangements to get the barren land around Vijaynagar irrigated. He ordered the construction of a city, Nagalpur, in the memory of his mother, Nagal Devi. The source of water for this city was a new pond. He got made extremely beautiful samples of flowers in the temple of Vittal Swamy. Painting continued for years in this temple.

At the age of 40 years, Krishnadeva Raya declared his six-year-old child to be the King and he himself began working as the Minister. Though he was not old as yet, he might have been apprehending his death due to some illness. It is said that seeing a child become the heir to the royal throne, Saluva Timma, a wicked minister of Krishnadeva Raya could see his ambitions turning to dust and he made attempts to get the child poisoned. At that time, Krishnadeva Raya was on deathbed. In full view of the court, he accused Saluva Timma and put him and his entire family behind the bars.

Till the time Krishnadeva Raya was alive, no external power had the courage to cast an evil eye on Vijaynagar. However, after Krishnadeva Raya's death, enemies started attacking Vijaynagar from all directions. His son too died after some time. Vijaynagar empire began to get weakened with every passing day and soon lost its glory.

PURANDARDAS

—C.K. Thirumalesh

KARNATAKA is unparalleled in natural beauty and it is also unique in the realm of literature and art. Karnataka was the birthplace of Madhavacharya and also place of propagation of religious teachers and saints like Shankaracharya and Ramanuja. Among this constellation of saints, the name of a devotional poet, Purandardas, deserves special mention. It is said that he composed four lakh verses and overwhelmed people with bliss, by singing them in his sweet voice. These verses have been set in various *ragas* (musical metre in Indian classical music) and are considered to be a priceless treasure of music.

It is said that Purandardas was initiated by Shri Vyas Teerth. Before seeking initiation, his name was Shrinivas Nayak. His father, Varadappa, was a merchant. He wanted his son to look after his business. At the right time, he married off his son to a beautiful girl named Saraswati. Srinivas enjoyed the pleasures of family life for a few years but one day an incident occurred that detached him from worldly affairs.

It is said that one day God came to Srinivas's house in the guise of a poor Brahmin and pleaded, "Son! I have to perform the sacred thread ceremony of my son, hence, kindly do a favour by giving this poor man some money at this time of dire need."

Srinivas, the merchant, was parsimonious by nature. He snubbed the poor Brahmin. Disappointed, the Brahmin went to Saraswati, the wife of Srinivas. Saraswati was greatly moved by his miserable condition. She did not have any cash with her, hence, she gave away an expensive nose-ring to the Brahmin and told him to get money by mortgaging the nose-ring.

The Brahmin took the nose-ring to the shop of Srinivas—the merchant and said, "mortgage this nose-ring and loan me some money for my sustenance." When Srinivas examined the nose-ring

carefully, a doubt arose in his mind—"This nose-ring appears to be that of my wife'. To dispel his doubts, he asked the Brahmin to wait at the shop and quickly returned to his house and asked his wife, "Saraswati, where is your nose-ring? Just show it to me, I have some work." Saraswati knew the nature of her husband very well. He very much preferred money to his wife. She got scared and thought, "Rather than being disgraced, it is better to end my life by consuming poison."

She went to her room and prepared a cup of poison, stood before an image of the God and started singing devotional songs in the honour of Hari (the Lord). As soon as she opened her eyes to drink the poison, she was surprised to see the nose-ring in the cup, instead of the poison.

Her husband standing behind her had witnessed the entire incident. He took the nose-ring to the shop, opened the chest, neither was the nose-ring given by the Brahmin there, nor was the Brahmin visible anywhere. This miraculous incident opened the eyes of Srinivas. He understood thoroughly the fact that the relevance of life lay in surrendering life to God. Having resolved so, he distributed all the wealth among the poor people and reached the 'mutt' of saint Vyas Teerth, along with his wife and children. Seeing his genuine devotion to God, Vyas Teerth gave him a sermon through *mantras* and changed his name to Purandardas.

It was from here that the life of Purandardas took a new turn. Immersed in the devotion to God, he would pray to his deity by composing new verses. In the beginning, he composed a few verses in praise of his wife, for he had attained this knowledge through her support. Purandardas visited several pilgrimage centers. In the end, he settled down at Hampi, the then capital of Vijaynagar kingdom. Even today, *mandap* (pavilion) of Purandardas still stands with its head held high, among the ruins of the capital.

Purandardas had four sons. All of them were great devotees of their father and were as skilled as him, in singing devotional songs. Purandardas popularized music through his songs and hymns, conveyed the hollowness of worldly illusions, tried to erase class distinctions and spread devotion through his praise of Lord Purandar Vittal.

Purandardas had adopted the Carnatic style in music, but his style and language are unique. He has couched his thoughts in beautiful poems. This devotee has presented a lively description of the childhood pranks of Krishna.

Purandardas would get up early in the morning and practise singing devotional songs of *Bhagavata* accompanied by a four-stringed musical instrument and would go door-to-door, along with his wife and children to beg for alms. Villagers would be surprised to see that a millionaire like Srinivas is roaming around, begging for alms. The greed and ego nurtured earlier, were nowhere near him now. Whatever he got by begging, he would not only feed his family, but it would also comprise a share for poor and the needy.

Purandardas preached to his devotees to lead a virtuous life. He would say—do not take loans, do not be greedy and do not remain discontented. He never worried for the next day. If any petitioner would come to him, he would give him all he had. He never accumulated anything in his house. His selfless nature won over everyone.

Purandardas was a contemporary of Maharaj (King) Shri Krishnadeva Raya. It is said that one day the King himself came to have a 'darshan' (glimpse) of Purandardas and took him back to his palace. In the course of their conversation, there was a discussion on money and riches. Purandar said, "King, this royalty cannot compare with the splendour of Vaishnav devotees, your wealth is fickle and transient. Thieves can steal it, but for us devotees, God is the real treasure. We have earned the devotion of God and the name of Hari (the Lord) is the touchstone."

It is said that this sermon by Purandardas made a profound impact on the King and he too became his admirer.

Purandardas was a prominent social worker too. He not only gave sermons to people on devotion to God, but also taught them the way to live an ideal life. He also used to participate in their moments of happiness and grief. Once a day, he would also visit the village and inquire about the villagers' well being. For this reason, he had become highly popular. The number of devotees

in his choir started swelling. At this, some officers of the state began to pester him, considering that his popularity could be a threat to the country's peace, but it only served to enhance his popularity further.

The sermons of Purandardas brought tranquility and peace to the people. While removing misconceptions of the people, he tried to make them understand that education without humility, money *sans* selfishness and rights without truth, are hollow. He challenged social reformers and religious heads that without self-purification, sermonizing others to reform, or giving religious sermons, does not mean much. Without purity of thought and behaviour, religious pilgrimage and marks of sandal paste are in vain. Having respect for teachers, serving the common people and giving food to hungry are the biggest virtuous deeds.

Like other saints, some miraculous incidents took place in the life of Purandardas too. On one occasion, while going around the country, he reached Tirupati. He hosted a big feast for the saints and devotees there. In the festivities, there was a scarcity of 'ghee'. It is said that God himself came there in the form of a saint to uphold his devotee's honour and served 'ghee' to the guests.

After a tour of India, Purandardas spent the rest of his days in Purandargarh.

The devotional songs of Purandardas can be relished in Hindi too. Baburao Kumethkar has written a book—*Purandardas ke Bhajan*, in which a translation of the devotional songs of Purandardas has been provided in verse. Some devotional songs (bhajans) from this book are provided below:

'Prarthana' (Prayer)

*Mein tujhse aur na maangoonga / Mere hriday kamal mein
tu sthir ho re swami, / Sir tab charan mein nat ho mere / Nayan
sada tujhe dekhien Shree Hari he / Karn tere geet sun lein nitya
/ Nirmaalya ghraan sevan kar lein hari / Vaani ko tab yash
gaane dein mere / Kar donon teri seva mein rat hon Paad
teerthyaatra mein chalen mera / Man anudin tere smaran*

magan ho Buddhi tujh mein leen hone dein / Magar mera chitt sada tujh mein sthir ho re swami / Bhakt jan ka sang hone de sada / Purandar Vittal du itni dayaa kar,

Stay steadfast in the core of my heart, oh Lord! My head may then bow at your feet, may my eyes always see you, Oh Hari, May the ears always listen to your songs, Be in my sensations unsullied, Allow my voice to sing praise, Both my hands should only be busy in serving you, My feet may walk for a pilgrimage, May my heart be busy in remembering you every day, Allow my intellect to be immersed in you, May my soul remain steadfast in your thought, oh Lord! Let there be association of devotees, Always have this much mercy, Purandar Vittal!"

'Tu he Raksha Kar' (Only You have to protect)

Kiska yehan kaun rin ka hai sansaar / Paani ka budbuda anitya Shri Hari / Pyaasa tha tab mein koop par jo gaya / Koop jal sookh kar masaan tha Shri Hari / Ghaam se bachne gaya vriksh chhaaya mein / Vriksh toot ke sir pe padaa Shri Hari / Van mein ghar baandh kar ped mein jhoolan baandha / Paalne ka shishu kho gaya Shri Hari / Baap he Purandar Vittal Narayan / Raakh re Shri Hari mrityu ke samay mein

Who belongs to whom, it is a world of debt, A bubble of water-transient Shri Hari! I was thirsty then, when I went to the well, The well had been dried up and resembled a cremation ground, To save myself from sun's heat, I went under the shade of a tree, The tree fell down on my head, Shri Hari, Made a house in the forest and tied a swing to a tree, The baby in the cradle was lost, Shri Hari, Oh my! Purandar Vittal Narayan, Shri Hari be with me at the time of my death."

'Apman hona hi Accha' (Better to be disrespected)

Apmaan honaa bhalaa / Aproop Harinaam, jap leen manuj ka Maan se abhimaan badh jaayega / Abhimaan se tap haani ho jaayegee / Maani Duryodhan ki haani huyi / Anuman nahin sam maan-apmaan kaa / Apmaan se tap badh jaayegaa / Apmaan se punya safal hoga Apmaan se Nrip Dhruvrai ko jaise / Kapat naatak Vishnu aparoksh tha hua / Mein kya

karoon kahaan jaoon kis ke paas / Kamal nayan Hari tu jab hai / Muni-jan rakshak Purandar Vittal / Mein maangoonga kewal apamaan hi,

Better to be disrespected, God's name is unparalleled, Respect will boost arrogance, Arrogance will harm penance, The arrogant Duryodhan suffered loss, You cannot imagine the equality in respect and disrespect, Disrespect will add to penance, Disrespect will make the good deed a success, Just as what disrespect had done to King Dhruvrai, Guileful act—Vishnu had appeared, What should I do, whom should I go to? When oh! Lotus-eyed, you are there, Saviour of saints and people—Purandar Vittal, Now I will ask only for disrespect'.

Jeewan Kushalta (Life's Dexterity)

Tairna chahiye, tair ke jeetna chaahiye / Bigde sansaar mein aasha na rahe aise / Taamras jal sa prem rakh is bhaav mein / Swami Ram keh ke gaa ke kaamit paa ke / Kaaju phal mein beej ghusne jaise bhav mein / Aasha na kar ati Vishnu bhakton ko nit / Maans-asha se meein jaisa phansta vaisa / Phans naa, bhaj nitya Purnadar Vittal ko

One should swim, having swimmied, you must win, This should not be the expectation in this world that has gone astray, Keep your love as pure as holy water, with such a feeling, Take Lord Ram's name and sing it in full ecstasy, Like the fruit of cashewnut, entering into the seed, such is mundane existence, Do not expect too much, Oh devotees of Vishnu, Just as the fish is caught in the hope of flesh, Don't get trapped, worship ceaselessly, says Purandar Vittal."

TULSIDAS

—Gargi Gupta

TULSIDAS is considered to be the greatest poet in Hindi, but he was also a reformer of devotees. Tulsi propagated the qualities of his Lord, Rama. He himself did not write about his life, but the references that are found in his books here and there, or the stories prevalent about him, give an idea about the incidents of his life. Their veracity can be doubted, because no conclusive evidence is found with regard to them.

It pertains to the middle of the 16th century. At that time, the Mughal emperor Akbar was ruling over India. There was a village known as 'Rajapur' in Banda district. A religious Brahmin by the name of Atmaram used to live there. When he was blessed with a son, his joy knew no bounds. He named the child, Raambola. The same Raambola grew up to be known as Tulsidas.

Whatever be the truth, Tulsidas was of an extremely benevolent, liberal and munificent nature. He was always prepared to help the poor. It is said that once a poor Brahmin came to Tulsidas with the expectation of some money for the marriage of his daughter. Tulsi was a carefree person. He sent him to his friend and a poet at Akbar's court—Abdurrahim Khankhana. Rahim gave the Brahmin lots of money and sent him to Tulsi with a letter, in which he had written a line in Tulsi's praise—

God liye Hulsī phirē Tulsi so sut hoye

Hulsi moves around with Tulsi, in her lap, he is the son.

It is believed that probably the name of the mother of Tulsidas was Hulsi. Tulsi has written in his book, *Kavitavali—Maatu-pita jag jaaye tajyon, vidhihu na likhi kuch bhal bhalai aur, jaayo kul mangan badhvano bajayo suni, bhayo paritaap paap janani janak ko'*, meaning—'The mother and father abandoned (the child) soon after the birth. God wrote misfortune in his fate.

At the time of the birth, the mother and father were very sad to hear the congratulatory messages and musical instruments'.

This much is certain that he did not get the shelter of parents since his childhood, but there are several legends about him being abandoned by his parents.

Some people say that he was born in 'Abhuktmool' constellation of stars. Hence, considering him to be unlucky, his parents abandoned him. Others say that in his planetary positions, his father's death was predicted, hence Tulsidas' father abandoned him. Some people feel that at the time of birth, his mother was scared on seeing his supernatural form and thinking that he was a destroyer of the family, sent him along with a maid-servant to the house of her in-laws, where his initial upbringing began.

But this much is certain that Tulsi did not get the comforting protection of his parents and his childhood was spent in abject poverty. It is said that a maid by the name of Chuniya brought up Tulsi with lot of love and affection. However, unfortunately, five years later, she left this world and the five-year-old helpless child, Tulsi was left wandering in this world all alone.

Begging alms from every household, one day suddenly a scholar called Narhari Shastri happened to see Tulsi. He recognized the latent talent in Tulsi and took him to his home. After a few days, Shastriji took Tulsi to Ayodhya for the sacred thread ceremony. Everyone was extremely surprised to see that without being taught by anyone, Tulsi had begun reciting 'Gayatri mantra'. Narhari Shastri got all the five rituals performed and gave him the initiation to 'Ram Mantra' and made him study Sanskrit literature.

Tulsi had a very sharp intellect and he used to quickly comprehend the teachings of his master and used to learn them by heart. His master was highly pleased with him. After this, he lived with Shesh Sanatanji at Kashi for 15 years and studied Vedas and Puranas.

Suddenly, one day Tulsi's heart began to yearn to go back to the house in his village. He sought the permission of his master and set out for his birthplace. When he saw the state of his house, he felt very sad. His mother had already passed away, his father

too had died just a few days ago. The entire house was in shambles. He somehow performed the *shraddh* (rites of passage) of his father and then set up the house and started living in it. There, he used to narrate the story of Rama everyday and would subsist on whatever he received.

Not much is known about Tulsi's marriage. The tale that is commonly known about his wife goes like this:

"Tulsi loved his wife very much. He did not even let her go to her mother's house. One day when Tulsi was not at home, Ratanvali's brother came to fetch her. Ratnavali could not suppress the strong desire to go to her father's house and went with her brother without seeking her husband's permission. When Tulsi returned in the evening, he found the house lonely. On asking the neighbours, he came to know that Ratnavali had gone to her mother's home.

It was a pitch-dark night of the dark part of the month and on top of that it was the rainy season. On the way, there was a river, which was in spate, due to torrential rains. Tulsi did not think twice and straightaway jumped into the surging river and quickly swam over to the other side. His clothes were drenched, but he was not worried about it. He reached the house of his in-laws in the same condition. Seeing her husband in such a condition, Ratnavali was irritated. Taunting him, she gave him a sweet scolding"

"Asthi charmmaye deh mam, taamein aisi preeti.

(The amount of love that you have for my body of bones and flesh),

Aisi jo Shri Ram mein haut no tab bhaav bheeti

(if only you could love Lord Ram as much,
you will not have any sorrow in this world)".

It is difficult to say how far this is true. At least the couplet has not been composed by Tulsidas. It is said that this sarcastic reproach hurt Tulsi a lot. His dormant detachment got activated and he immediately returned. Now he began to concentrate on

devotion to Ram and renounced the worldly illusions. After that he began to sing devotional songs and roam around in places of pilgrimage.

The life of Tulsidas had been spent in great hardships. He had become an orphan in his childhood. He had sustained himself by begging for alms. He had to bear humiliation because of poverty. People were ready to do any sort of work—good or bad, to sustain themselves. Many people would even sell off their children. There were no ideals for the society to follow. The world of religious heads was different from that of the common folk. Several religious heads made fun of Tulsidas. But Tulsi was not disappointed at all this. His poems reflect a voice of hope and confidence. There were three traits in his character, which can be known through his literature. He was of a very soft and emotional disposition and he had unwavering faith in Rama.

It is said that in the beginning, Tulsi used to compose his poems in Sanskrit. In those days, scholars, normally used to write in Sanskrit, but the common people did not understand Sanskrit. Hence, for the good of the society, Tulsi composed a work in *lingua franca*.

From Kashi, Tulsi went to Ayodhya and in 1547 A.D, on 'Ramnavmi' (birthday of Lord Ram), he began composing *Ramcharitmanas*. The work was completed in two years, seven months and twenty six days. This work of Tulsi is renowned the world over and has been written in Avadhi language. *Ramcharitmanas* is also known as Ramayana.

During the times of Tulsidas, mutual discrimination had been spreading among the people. In the field of religion, some worshipped Shiva, while others worshipped Vishnu. These people kept fighting with each other. Hence, Tulsi devised a path to preserve peace between them, in which all the deities were considered to be different forms of the same God. Considering Ram to be a God, he made him worship Shiva and on the other hand, treating Shiva as a devotee of Ram succeeded in defusing the conflict to quite an extent.

Tulsi informed the people about the ills and excesses afflicting

the Hindu society. He gave birth to confidence and self-belief in God among the people. Besides *Ramcharitmanas*, Tulsidas wrote several other books like *Kavitavali*, *Geetavali*, *Krishnageetavali*, *Vinayapatrika* etc.

Tulsidas was a contemporary of Surdas. It is said that on one occasion both the poets had a meeting. Surdas had become quite old by then and used to compose poems very rarely. Tulsidas was a youth and had just begun composing poems.

Chitrakoot, Ayodhya and Kashi were extremely dear to Tulsidas. During his last days, Tulsidas lived in Kashi. There he developed pain in his arms because of which he had to endure a lot of hardships. It is said that during those days, an epidemic broke out in Kashi, which in all probability, was plague. People started dying in large numbers after a lot of suffering. In 1623 A.D, in the month of Shravan (the fifth month according to Hindu calendar), he died. This couplet about his death is popular:

Samvat Sorah sau asi, asi Gang ke teer,

In Samvat 1680, on the banks of Ganges,

Saavan shukla saptami, Tulsi tajyo shareer

on the seventh day in the moonlit half of the fifth lunar month, Tulsi passed away'.

But some people do not agree with this date and it is said that he passed away in the dark half of the month. Hence this couplet—

Samvat Sorah sau asi, asi Gang ke teer,

In Samvat 1680, on the Asi bank of Ganga,

Saavan syaama teej sani, Tulsi tajyo shareer

In the rainy season, on the third day of the fortnight,

On a Saturday, Tulsi passed away'.

The following verse of Tulsidas was very dear to Gandhiji. He usually used to sing this verse in his prayers—

*Janani sam jaanahi par naari, dhan paraaye vish tein
vish bhaari*

Treat every woman not known to you as thy mother, and

others' money as the worst poison,

*Je harashi parsampati dekhi, dukhit hoyee parabiipati
bisekhi,*

The one who is happy at the prosperity of others and gloomy
at the misery of others,

*Jinhi Ram tum pranpiyare, tinhake man subh sadan
tumahre,*

Swami sakhaa pitu, maatu, guru, jinh ke sab tum taat

To whom you are the master, friend, father, mother, teacher
and all those to whom you are dear, their heart is your
dwelling auspicious

Man mandir tinhke basahu, seeya sahit dou bhraat,

Oh Lord Rama, in the temple of their heart may you two
brothers reside along with Sita'.

(–*Ramcharitmanas*)



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